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GOAT ALLEY

GOAT ALLEY

A TRAGEDY OF NEGRO LIFE

By

ERNEST HOWARD CULBERTSON



CINCINNATI
STEWART KIDD COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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TO

FREDERIC AND ALICE MULHERN ROBINSON

INTRODUCTION

In a dingy little hall on a side street Mr. Ernest Howard Culbertson began rehearsals of "Goat Alley," his tragedy of Negro life in a Washington slum. The actors were, with one exception, amateurs—colored working people who gave their time and services for the sake of what they felt to be an artistic expression of the life of their race. The author had no sociological intention; he had no ambition to be a propagandist. He had not even a special interest in the racial problem. He thought that he had come upon an action that has the quality of tragic inevitability. He thought, furthermore, that tragedy does not reside in pomp and circumstance, but in the profound realities of human helpfulness and human suffering, and that poor Lucy Belle struggling to maintain her spiritual integrity in Goat Alley was a protagonist worthy of the sternest art and the largest sympathy.

He built up his action from within. He saw that the Negro cannot yet hope, like the white man, to transcend common standards. He must first reach them. Hence the Negro girl's struggle for her own integrity is not yet the struggle of Nora or Magda—the struggle to be true to herself; it is the struggle to remain true to the man of her real choice. To transcend a necessary order one must first have achieved it. The achievement of social order in the moral sense is therefore the

INTRODUCTION

right and necessary aim of the Negro proletarian and the right and necessary theme of a drama dealing with his life.

In the play, Lucy Belle fights valiantly her losing fight. Loneliness, poverty, ignorance, terror, drive her from disaster to disaster, from one unwilling infidelity to another. But she never wavers in her soul. In her utter confusion and failure she kills the child that stands between her and all her hopes and at once expiates that action with her own death. Neither the subject nor the circumstances are new. But novelty is no mark of fine literature. The motives, the people, the place, the color of life—these are new. Every triangle play is a "Medea". There are subjects that are classical because they are native to the character and circumstances of mankind. Such is the subject of "Goat Alley". The structure is pure and uncompromising. No American play has had a finer or truer moment than that at the end of the second act when Lucy Belle, her lodger lost, her money stolen, her child crying with hunger, consents quietly, yet in such despair, to rent her vacant room to the worthless, ingratiating barber. Hauptmann would not have disdained that quiet moment of rich, tragic implications; Galsworthy would have approved it.

No competent observer will fail to note here the evidence of an effort as serious, as intelligent, as sensitive to the character and quality of what makes tragedy as our recent theatre has produced.

LUDWIG LEWISOHN.

New York, July, 1921.

GOAT ALLEY

CHARACTERS

LUCY BELLE DORSEY
SLIM DORSEY
SAM REED
AUNT REBECCA
LIZZIE GIBBS
JEFF BISBEE
CHICK AVERY
JEREMIAH POCHER
FANNY DORSEY }
ISRAEL DORSEY } *Children*
BABY
POLICEMAN

GOAT ALLEY was first publicly presented at the Bijou Theatre,
New York City, on the evening of June 20, 1921.

ACT I

The curtain rises on the sitting-room of a Negro's squalid dwelling in Goat Alley, Washington, D. C. At Right Back, there is a door giving directly on the street and when it is open one gets a glimpse of the miserable, tumble-down houses on the opposite side. At Left Back is a window, with one pane broken and an old shirt stuffed in the hole. The one or two old rag-carpet rugs which lie on the floor serve only in a small measure to cover its bareness. Several old, broken and battered chairs stand here and there about the room. At Left Center is a door leading into the other downstairs room of the house. Between it and the wall, Back, is a door opening into a closet.

There is another door, down Right, giving on a flight of stairs which lead to the one upper room of the house. Near the door, Left Center, and toward the front stands a battered table on which lie, in disordered array newspapers and one or two dog-eared books with their backs off. It is evening and a lighted oil lamp, with the chimney badly smoked, rests in the center. The wick is turned low and the guttering flame causes countless shadows to disport themselves eerily about the room. Between the door, Left Center, and the door, up Left, stands a fancy cupboard. There is a large easy chair between the table and the wall, Left

GOAT ALLEY

Center. Both of these pieces of furniture look out of place in the room.

Flamboyant lithographs, a gilt-framed picture of Jack Johnson, wearing his golden smile, a framed engraving of Abraham Lincoln, and several grotesque crayon portraits of members of the family adorn the dirty and discolored walls. An old corset, a half-eaten roll, and a doll, with its head off, lie about on the floor. A horseshoe is nailed over the center of the door, Back.

Aunt Rebecca, an old coal-black Negress, enters, Back. She wears no hat and has just a shawl thrown over her shoulders. She presents the appearance of an animated mummy. Her eyes are small and bead-like and shine with an uncanny lustre; her hands are long and bony, resembling the talons of a hawk. She glances about inquisitorily, gives an impatient grunt, then turns and slowly closes the door.

AUNT REBECCA (in high-pitched raspy tones as she moves to the Center)

Lucy Belle! Oh, Lucy Belle!

LUCY BELLE (from the next room)

Dat yo', Aun' Becky?

AUNT REBECCA

Yas, honey.

LUCY BELLE

Jes' a minute. Changin' mah skirt.

(Aunt Rebecca drops into a chair, Left Center, and begins a weird and doleful chant.)

GOAT ALLEY

AUNT REBECCA

Um — a — um — a — um — a — um — a — um
— a — um — a! Trouble in mah soul! Um — a —
um — a — um — a — um — a — um — a — um
a! Trouble! (*High treble*) Um — a — um — a —
um — a — um — a — um — a! Trouble in mah soul!
Um — a — um — a — um — a — um — a —
um — a! Trouble in mah soul! Um — a — um
a — um — a — um — a — um — a!

(*Lucy Belle enters, Left. She is a frail, light brown young Negress of about twenty-eight. She has a nervous, hesitant—and sometimes wistful—manner. She wears a plain black waist and a black skirt, patched in several places.*)

LUCY BELLE (*feelingly, as she kisses Aunt Rebecca*)
Aun' Becky! I'se so glad ter see yo' agin!
'Deed I is! (*Draws up a chair and sits near her.*)

AUNT REBECCA (*affectionately*)

Po'ful glad ter see yo', honey!

LUCY BELLE

Seem like ole times—seein' yo'! Lessee—how
some long yo' all been 'way?

AUNT REBECCA (*reflectively*)

Um! Um! (*Puts a hand to her head and purses her lips.*) Dat gin got mah haid all tangle up!
Um! Keep tellin' G'orge whiskey suit me bettah
—but he like gin. How long? Um! Um!
Gawd-a-massy! Be a yeah in Feb-wary!

(*Lucy Belle exclaims incredulously.*)

LUCY BELLE

Go 'long!

GOAT ALLEY

AUNT REBECCA

Sho' has! I—I was free mon's in Cumberlan' wid Sadie—she dat slim yallow one, yo' know—got a mole on dis cheek. (*Indicates.*) Some say dat de reason she so lucky. I ain' sayin'. Up dere mos' six mon's wid Em'ly—she dat fat brown gal. (*Lucy Belle nods.*) An' den I reckon 'bout fo' mon's in Frederick wid Henry. (*Throws back her head proudly.*) Henry great big fine lookin' niggah. Ain' so lucky, dough. Bawn in de da'k ob de moon.

LUCY BELLE

I 'member him. I 'member seein' him 'roun' yere w'en his fader died—ole Uncle Henry,—

AUNT REBECCA (*scornfully*)

Huh! Dat niggah was'n' his fader. No, indeedy! Dat lil' scrootchin' monkey was'n' calc'lated ter be de fader ob no boy like Henry.

(*Lucy Belle gives an exclamation of surprise. Aunt Rebecca sits in perplexed preoccupation for several moments. At length she speaks very slowly—dragging out the words, one after another.*)

AUNT REBECCA

'Deed chile, I kain't seem ter 'member who Henry's fader was. Dat gin got mah haid so tangle up.

LUCY BELLE

Lot done happen since yo' been 'way.

AUNT REBECCA

Don' I know it! Don' I know it!

GOAT ALLEY

(Fanny Dorsey, a little Negro girl of eight, and Israel Dorsey, a little Negro boy of four, run in, Left.)

FANNY

Mamma! Yo' all gwine 'way?

LUCY BELLE

I ain' gwine nowhar.

ISRAEL

Mamma! Git me some candy!

LUCY BELLE *(harshly, as she rises)*

Yo' all hush! I ain' gwine ter git yo' nuffin!

FANNY

Mamma! I wan' ter go out an' play wid Gordy!

LUCY BELLE

Shet up! Yo' ain' gwine ter play wid nobody!

Git in dere an' git ter bed! Go 'long! Yo' yere me? *(Threateningly.)* Wan' me ter beat yo'?

ISRAEL

Mamma! Git me—

(Lucy Belle grabs them roughly and pushes them through the door, Left, closing it after them. Their cries are heard for several moments and then gradually cease.)

LUCY BELLE *(irritably)*

Some day I'se gwine ter git good an' mad an' knock dere hails off!

AUNT REBECCA

How's Sam—?

LUCY BELLE *(drops down on a chair near Aunt Rebecca and exclaims ecstatically)*

Jes' great! Aun' Becky, he's de bes' ole budigee in de worl'!

GOAT ALLEY

AUNT REBECCA

Ain' nobody got nuffin' on Sam.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' said it! Jes' as good ter me as he know how ter be. Do ev'ythin' I ask him.

AUNT REBECCA

Don' haf ter tell me dat.

LUCY BELLE

He's de onlies' niggah I evah loved.

AUNT REBECCA

Don' make 'em no bettah den Sam.

LUCY BELLE

He's mah honey-baby, buddy boy!

AUNT REBECCA (*with a good-natured chuckle*)

Listen ter yo'!

LUCY BELLE (*her face clouding*)

But he ain' had such good luck lately—.

AUNT REBECCA

How come dat—?

LUCY BELLE

I dunno—. Till 'bout a monf ago he wuk steady fo de Simpson Express Company. Drive a wagon fo' dem.

AUNT REBECCA

Dat w'at he doin' w'en I lef'.

LUCY BELLE

Sho', sho'—. Good job, too. But de wuk gits slack—an' dey lets him out.

AUNT REBECCA

Go 'long!

LUCY BELLE

He try an' try ter git anoder job—but could'n' seem ter fin' nuffin'. Times is bad, yo' know.

GOAT ALLEY

Neah walk his feet off jes' seein' ef he kain't git somefin' by de day.

AUNT REBECCA

Yo' don' say!

LUCY BELLE

Sam's as steady as dey make 'em. Ef he ain' wukkin he jes' 'bout goes crazy.

AUNT REBECCA

Don' I know it.

LUCY BELLE

So finally he up an' gwine ter Baltimo'—an' gits a job wid de Street Departmen'—diggin' ditches fo' wattah mains.

AUNT REBECCA

In Baltimo'—!

LUCY BELLE

Yas, indeedy! I been at him fo' a long time ter go ovah dere.

AUNT REBECCA

Yo' is—!

LUCY BELLE

Aun' Becky, dey's some niggahs 'roun' dis town —dat jes' watchin' dere chanct ter blackguard him an me—git back at us any way dey kin.

AUNT REBECCA (*with a little snort*)

Go 'long, now—w'at yo' talkin' 'bout.

LUCY BELLE

Dey sho' is—! An' jes as soon as he git somefin' steady—an' dat pay a lil' bettah we gwine ter move ovah dere.

AUNT REBECCA (*with a wail*)

Gawd-a-massy, w'at yo' po' ole Aun' Becky gwine ter do!

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Be mighty sorry ter leave yo', Aun' Becky—!

AUNT REBECCA (*with facetious fervor*)

Why, chile, w'at yo' 'spose I done come back
ter Wash'nin' fo'?

LUCY BELLE

I know yo' gwine ter miss me—an' I'se gwine
ter miss yo'—but it tain' so far away dat I kain't
git ovah—now an' den. An' yo' kin come ovah
an' see me—!

AUNT REBECCA (*shaking her head*)

Lawsy, lawsy—dat's de way. Jes' as soon as
yo' git ter likin' somebody—dey up an' gwine
'way.

LUCY BELLE

It gwine ter be bes' fo' bof ob us, Aun' Becky—!

AUNT REBECCA

I reckon yo' know—but jes' de same—

LUCY BELLE

An'—an' terday I feels mo' like we got ter git
'way den evah.

AUNT REBECCA

How come dat—?

LUCY BELLE

Yo' know Sam ain' nevah had nuffin' much ter
do wid oder gals.

AUNT REBECCA (*with a nod*)

He don' look like he 'ud chase 'em much.

LUCY BELLE

He don'! He ain' dat kin'! But—but fo' de
las' free weeks dey's a gal dat he uster know—
long time ago—keep comin' 'roun' yere.

GOAT ALLEY

AUNT REBECCA

Go 'long!

LUCY BELLE

Her name Lizzie Gibbs—an' she de hardes' ole
yallow gal yo' evah seen.

AUNT REBECCA

She come 'roun' yere—!

LUCY BELLE

Sam only gits home onct or twict a week—
mos'ly only onct. I allas goes ter de do' w'en
he's yere—an' ef she come—he duck upstairs
fo' she kin lay eyes on him.

AUNT REBECCA

Would'n' stan' fo' nuffin' like dat!

LUCY BELLE

W'at yo' gwine ter do? She so hard she liable
ter do anathin'. She—she was yere dis mawnin'.
She say she gwine ter keep comin' 'till she see
Sam.

AUNT REBECCA

Gawd-a-massy! Put de *po*-lice on her—!

LUCY BELLE (*shakes her head*)

Ef I do dat, she liable ter make trouble—

AUNT REBECCA

W'at trouble kin she make ef dey locks her up?

LUCY BELLE

She might make trouble 'tween me an' Sam—
ef she's a min' ter—

AUNT REBECCA

'Tween yo' an' Sam—! Go 'long!

LUCY BELLE

Sam don' care no mo' fo' her den he do a rat—
but she crazy jealous—

GOAT ALLEY

AUNT REBECCA

'Co'se she is—an' dat's de reason—

LUCY BELLE (*touches Aunt Rebecca on the knee*)

I tell yo' why I got ter go easy wid her—till I see mah way out. Maybe yo' kin he'p me—

AUNT REBECCA

Sho'—!

LUCY BELLE

Yo' see she's de onlies' one ob all dem black-guardin' niggahs dat uster live 'roun' me ovah dere in Carter Street—fo' I moves yere ter Goat Alley— (*Breaks off and stares sombrely into space for several moments, then proceeds with a slight catch in her voice.*) Aun' Becky, I'se had it hard. Ain' nevah had much luck— 'deed I ain'—'cept meetin' up wid Sam agin.

AUNT REBECCA

Yo' ain' nevah tol' me much 'bout yo'se'f.

LUCY BELLE

Nevah tol' nobody—much. W'at's de use?

AUNT REBECCA

Go on! W'at's on yo' min'?

LUCY BELLE

Mah moder died w'en I'se fifteen—an' Pap goes off ter Texas an' I ain' nevah seen him since. Slim—mah bro'der—he was jes' a lil' kid— baby mos'—an' I did'n' have no oder people.

AXNT REBECCA

Bless yo' soul—!

LUCY BELLE

Done mos' anathin' I could—jes' ter make a livin'. Wuk in laundries, cook, wait on tables—. Starts gwine 'roun' wid de boys, too. Yo' know

GOAT ALLEY

how a gal is. Meets up wid Sam an' Jeff Bisbee an' Ed Cales—an' a bunch-a oders like dem. Jeff hang 'roun' aftah me mos' all de time—an' Sam do, too. Sam allas a wuk steady—but Jeff, he nevah wukked 'less he had ter. He's—he a hard niggah—allas drunk, an' fightin' an' shootin' crap. But—well—yo' know how a gal is— (*Aunt Rebecca grunts and nods.*) He looks good ter me, kase he wear swell clothes, an' spend money free, an' boas' how many cops he cut. Was'n' long, dough, fo' Jeff git crazy jealous-a Sam—an' one day—down yere in Four-an'-a-ha'f Street—dey meets up an' has a fight. (*As though somewhat thrilled by the memory of it.*) Man-day, but dey flew at each oder! Like a couple-a wildcats! But de police bus' in on 'em. Dey ketch Jeff—but Sam git away.

AUNT REBECCA

Mah soul—!

LUCY BELLE

Jeff gits six mon's in de wukhouse. I meets up wid Sam a few days aftah. Like de fool I is—I 'cuses him ob startin' de fight.

AUNT REBECCA

Hush yo' mouf!

LUCY BELLE

I did'n' know who did—'zactly—but I was sore kase Jeff was in jail. He been takin' me 'roun', yo' see—spendin' lots-a money on me—an'—an'—Oh, well I jes' a damn fool, kase I ain' got nobody ter look aftah me. (*Shakes her head remorsefully.*) Sam gits mad—an' quits comin'

GOAT ALLEY

'roun' ter see me. Tells me, now, dat he git de idea dat I didn't care nuffin' at all 'bout him. All de time he crazy 'bout me! (*Pauses a moment in reverent thought.*) He was livin' ovah in M Street. Ole Lizzie Gibbs livin' dere, too. Dat's whar he meets up wid her. She had been foolin' 'roun' aftah him fo' a long time. Aftah dat scrap me an' him had, he gits so down in de mouf dat he takes up wid her fo' a while.

AUNT REBECCA

Dat ole yallow gal yo' jes' tellin' me 'bout?

LUCY BELLE (*nodding*)

Yas. But only fo' a lil' while—he say. He seen right away how hard she was—an' dat she was'n' no good—an' he draps her like a hot tater.

AUNT REBECCA

Reckon he would—!

LUCY BELLE

Den he decides ter beat it—an' goes off ter Atlanta. Stays dere five yeahs. Only come back yere 'bout a yeah ago.

AUNT REBECCA

An' yo' ain' seen him—all dat time?

LUCY BELLE

No.

AUNT REBECCA

Gawd-a-massy!

LUCY BELLE

But he say he was thinkin' 'bout me all de time! Nevah fo'git me an' nevah seen any oder gal dat he like bettah! (*Shakes her head.*) An' I sho' nevah did fo'git him! Ef I'd only stuck

GOAT ALLEY

ter him. Would'n' have had ha'f de trouble I is. Yo' see—yo' see, aftah he'd been gone a while I began ter see w'at a good fellah he'd been. (*Pauses a moment in sombre thought.*) While Jeff was in de wukhouse I marries Ed Cales. He uster bootblack on de Avenue an' carry sample cases fo' drummers. Fo' a lil' while he drive a wagon fo' a white man dat run a meat stan' on Louisiana Avenue. But mos' de time he don' do nuffin' but lay 'roun de house. (*Contemptuously.*) |He wasn' no good—jes' a loafin', no-count niggah dat lay 'roun an' let a gal wuk fo' him—long as she would stan' fo' it. I lives wid him two yeahs. Den one day he say he gwine down ter Richmon' fo' a few days, beats it off—an' I ain' nevah seen him since.

AUNT REBECCA

Yo' lucky ter git rid-a him so easy!

LUCY BELLE (*nodding*)

'Deed I was! (*Sighs heavily.*) 'Bout free mon's aftah dat I meets Jeff Bisbee ovah in Gerner's one day—an'—an' he walks home wid me. I'se livin' ovah in Carter Street den. (*Gives a little nervous shudder.*) He shoot off his mouf great. Tol' me how much he think-a me—an' dat I is de onlies' gal dat evah got him goin'—an' all dat kin'-a stuff. He say dat he broke—but dat he 'spec' ter collec' some money in a week or two—an' dat he don' know w'at he gwine ter do till den. Begs me ter let him stay dere wid me fo' a few days. (*Drops her head and sighs.*) I finally does. De longer he stay de harder he

GOAT ALLEY

git, an' by-an'-by he say ef I don' let him stay dere all de time he gwine ter kill me. He say ef I call de *po*-lice he gwine ter lay fo' me—an' watch his chanct—night an' day—till he git me. Hones', I gits so scar't I did'n' hardly know w'at ter do. An'—an' so he keeps livin' on dere wid me—an' I keeps thinkin' mo' an' mo' 'bout Sam—an' wishin' I'd stuck ter him—an' dat I knowed whar he was.

AUNT REBECCA

'Deed, honey, I knows how yo' must-a felt.

LUCY BELLE

He wuk in a livery stable ovah on C Street fo' a while. Couldn' git him ter do nuffin' steady. Mos' de time he jes' lay 'roun' de house an' Guzzle gin—guzzle gin—an' w'en he ain' doin' dat, he out in de alley shootin' crap wid Mink Hall an' Slim an' dat gang.

AUNT REBECCA

He wuss den no-count!

LUCY BELLE

I was a fool, I knows—ter stick ter him. 'Deed I was! But I'se so scar't an' down in de mouf dat I ain' got good sense. (*Aunt Rebecca nods sympathetically.*) All de time Jeff keep gittin' harder an' harder. An' me wukkin' mah haid off ter feed him an' de chillen. Ev'y onct in while he gits mad an' beats me up. Finally I'se pretty neah crazy. One night w'en he's away I gits mah broder Slim ter come ovah an' he'p me. We packs ev'ythin' up an' moves ovah yere—an' I did'n' tell nobody whar I was gwine.

GOAT ALLEY

AUNT REBECCA

Yo' look like yo' had somefin' on yo' min'—dat fust day I seen yo' yere!

LUCY BELLE

'Deed I did! (*Shakes her head.*) Ain' seen hide nor hair-a him since. (*Abruptly, after a moment or two of troubled thought.*) Yo'—yo' see, Aun' Becky, ef dey's anobody in de worl' dat Sam hate—it—it Jeff Bisbee—

AUNT REBECCA

Sho! Sho!

LUCY BELLE

Hate him like poison! (*Hesitatingly.*) I—I ain' nevah tol' him dat I live wid Jeff.

AUNT REBECCA

Yo' ain'—?

LUCY BELLE

Ain' had de nerve! He know dat I married Ed Cales—an' I tol' him mos' ev'ythin' else—an' he say w'at is pas is pas'. But yo' see it was Jeff dat bus' him an' me up befo'—an' he call him de hardes' niggah in Wash'nin'—

AUNT REBECCA

Any way ob him findin' out—?

LUCY BELLE

Only ef somebody tell him.

AUNT REBECCA

Who know—?

LUCY BELLE

Slim, an' dem people in Carter Street, an' ole Lizzie Gibbs—

AUNT REBECCA

She know—?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*nodding*)

Sho'.

AUNT REBECCA

Den' yo' bettah watch out—kase ef she like w'at yo' tell me she ain' gwine ter keep it to herse'f.

LUCY BELLE

I reckon she ain'—an' dat's w'at got me so worried. Yo see, she yere Sam talk so much 'bout me dat it make her crazy jealous. W'en he gwine 'way ter Atlanta, she figure dat ef he come back he mos' likely come ter me fust. Leas'-ways dat w'at I think she figure. So she move ovah dere ter Carter Street, an' take a house near me, wid de idea dat maybe she kin bus' me an' Sam up—ef he come back. I was married ter Ed Cales den—but aftah while I takes up wid Jeff—like I done tol' yo'—an' all de time she's watchin' me like a hawk widout me knowin' it—.

AUNT REBECCA

Tryin' ter git somefin' on yo'—!

LUCY BELLE

Sho'! An' now—now dat she found out whar I live—an' dat he's back—she's comin' at me agin—!

AUNT REBECCA

Put de *po*-lice on her!

LUCY BELLE

Den she boun' ter tell Sam—an' lie an' black-guard on me wuss den evah—! Don' yo' see—? (*Twining and intertwining her fingers and staring*

GOAT ALLEY

into space with a distraught expression.) I don' know w'at ter do!

(The children suddenly give vent to shouts and can be heard romping wildly in the room, off Left.)

LUCY BELLE *(rising)*

Listen ter dem chillen—! *(Moving toward, Left.) 'Scuse me while I puts dem ter bed.*

(Aunt Rebecca sits in a brown study.)

AUNT REBECCA *(as Lucy Belle nears the door, Left)*

Lucy Belle—!

LUCY BELLE *(pausing)*

Yas.

AUNT REBECCA

Who de fader ob Fanny?

LUCY BELLE

Ed Cales. *(Hesitatingly) Is-Israel is—is Jeff's.*

(Aunt Rebecca grunts and nods. Lucy Belle goes out, Left. Aunt Rebecca sits pondering for several moments and then begins to chant.)

AUNT REBECCA *(chanting)*

Um—a—um—a—um—a—um—a—um
—a! Trouble in mah soul! Um—a—um—a—
um—a—um—a—um—a—um—a—um
a! Trouble in mah soul! Um—a—um—a—um
—a—um—a—um—a—um—a—um
a! Trouble in mah soul! Um—a—um—a—um
—a—um—a—um—a—um—a!

(A knock sounds on the door, Back. Aunt Rebecca glances toward the door and gives an annoyed grunt. The knock sounds again. Aunt

GOAT ALLEY

Rebecca gets up, grumbling to herself, goes to the door and opens it. Lizzie Gibbs steps in. She is a large, voluptuous, mulatto woman. She has straight hair, high cheek bones, and large coarse features. Her manner is over-bearing and insolent.)

LIZZIE

H'yo'—?

AUNT REBECCA (*surveying her with an air of frank suspicion and disapproval*)

W'at yo' wan'—?

LIZZIE (*swaggering down toward Center with her hands on her hips*)

Sam Reed live yere, don' he—?

AUNT REBECCA

None ob yo' bus'ness weder he do or weder he don'—!

LIZZIE (*savagely*)

Go 'long, yo' ole black wench! Don' yo' give me no back talk! (*Glaring at her malevolently.*)
Don' yo' spose I knows he live yere—! Is he home?

AUNT REBECCA (*sullenly*)

Don' know.

LIZZIE

Whar is he—?

AUNT REBECCA

Don' know.

LIZZIE

Yo' don' know nuffin', d'yo'—?

GOAT ALLEY

(Aunt Rebecca stands glaring fiercely at Lizzie. Lucy Belle can be heard in the next room speaking to the children.)

LIZZIE

Lucy Belle's yere, ain' she—?

AUNT REBECCA *(shortly)*

I reckon so.

LIZZIE

Tell her I wan' ter see her.

(Aunt Rebecca hesitates for a moment, then shuffles over toward the door on the left, and goes out. Lizzie swaggers about the room, examining various objects with an expression of sardonic contempt. Presently Lucy Belle enters, Left—falteringly.)

LIZZIE *(pausing, hunching herself down on one hip, and gazing at Lucy Belle with an expression of sneering venom)*

'Lo Luce!

LUCY BELLE

W'at yo' wan'—?

LIZZIE *(with an explosive, sardonic laugh)*

Listen ter yo'—!

LUCY BELLE

I—I done tol' yo' dat I don' know whar Sam is!

LIZZIE *(harshly)*

Look yere, gal, d'yo' think yo' puttin' somefin' ovah on me?

LUCY BELLE

Dat's de Gawd's truf—I'm tellin' yo'.

LIZZIE

Tryin' ter make out he ain' nevah yere—!

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

He ain'—! Hones'—

LIZZIE

Yo' lie—! Yo' knows whar he is—an' w'en he come home as well as yo' standin' dere—!

LUCY BELLE

I ain' seen him in Gawd knows w'en—!

LIZZIE

People in de neighborhood tell me dey see him yere ev'y few days—!

LUCY BELLE

Dey crazy—! Shootin' off dey moufs 'bout somefin' dey don' know nuffin' 'bout—!

LIZZIE

Does yo' think yo' gwine ter salt him away—an' nevah let nobody lay eyes on him agin?

LUCY BELLE

W'at 'ud I be doin' anathin' like dat fo'—?

LIZZIE (*mockingly*)

Yas—w'at would yo' be doin' anathin' like dat fo'—?

LUCY BELLE

Nevah git away wid it—ef I did!

LIZZIE

An' yo' ain' gwine git away wid nuffin' like dis—neder!

LUCY BELLE

Yo' don' know w'at yo' talkin' 'bout—!

LIZZIE

I'se knowed Sam as long as yo' is.

LUCY BELLE

Who say yo' ain'—?

GOAT ALLEY

LIZZIE

Yo' stan' dere an' act like somebody was gwine ter steal him—right from under yo' nose—!

LUCY BELLE

I don' know w'at yo' talkin' 'bout—!

LIZZIE (*mockingly*)

No—yo' don' know nuffin'—! To yere yo' talk, yo'd think yo' owned Sam—got him chain up like a dawg—! Mah soul—! (*Vehemently.*) Listen ter me, gal—he's an' ole frien'—a mine— an' I wants ter see him—'bout some bus'ness— an' ef yo' know w'ats good fo' yo'—yo' bettah quit dis lyin' an' beatin' 'roun' de bush—an'—

(*Footsteps and whistling are heard off stage, Back. Lizzie breaks off abruptly and both stand listening. A moment later the door, Back, opens and Slim Dorsey enters. He is a tall, slender, light-colored Negro of about twenty-four. He wears a cap pulled around so that the visor slants over one ear, and an old ragged suit of clothes. He glares at Lizzie and nods.*)

SLIM (*as he slouches toward Left Center*)

'Lo Luce.

LIZZIE (*as she sidles toward the door, Back—to Lucy Belle*)

Yo' yered w'at I said—! Dat goes bof ways— an' all 'roun' de squah. (*With a hand on the doorknob.*) Jes' remembah dat I'se knowed yo' a good while, too. (*With drawling, veiled menace.*) Is—is yo' evah tol' Sam how much yo' love Jeff Bisbee—?

GOAT ALLEY

(Lucy Belle's body becomes rigid, she clenches her hands, and speaks in a choking voice.)

LUCY BELLE

Yo'—yo' shet up—!

LIZZIE (with a bellowing, sardonic laugh)

Ha! Ha! Why don' yo' tell him someday—?

(She goes out, Back.)

LUCY BELLE (violently)

Damn her! I'se gwine ter break ev'y bone in her body—ef she keep aftah me!

SLIM

W'at's de mattah—?

LUCY BELLE

She—she de hardes' ole gal in Wash'nin—

SLIM

Jes' fin' dat out—?

LUCY BELLE

Allas gwine 'roun' makin' trouble fo' somebody—!

SLIM

W'at she comin' at yo' 'bout—?

LUCY BELLE (slowly gets control of herself—and ponders for a moment)

Oh—oh, nuffin'—!

SLIM

Aftah Sam—ain' she—?

LUCY BELLE

She think she is—!

SLIM

Bettah watch her—!

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Don' yo' worry—I is! (*She goes to the window, Left Back, and peers out, then turns and comes slowly down to Center.*)

SLIM

How is yo'—?

LUCY BELLE

I don' know—not so good dis week—!

SLIM

Whar Sam—?

LUCY BELLE

Baltimo'—! W'at d'vo' know—?

SLIM

A lot. (*He takes a bag of tobacco and a package of papers from his pocket and proceeds leisurely to roll a cigarette.*)

LUCY BELLE

W'at—?

SLIM (*as he painstakingly rolls the cigarette*)

Seen Jeff dis mawnin'—.

LUCY BELLE (*with a gasp*)

Jeff—! Jeff Bisbee—!

SLIM (*with a nonchalant nod*)

Sho' nuff—!

LUCY BELLE (*clutching his arm*)

Whar—?

SLIM

Bennings—.

LUCY BELLE

De race track—.

SLIM

Yas.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Did he see yo'—?

SLIM

Sho' he seen me—!

LUCY BELLE

Say anathin'—?

SLIM (*nodding*)

Come up an' grab me.

LUCY BELLE

Gawd sakes—!

SLIM

Wan' ter know right off whar yo' is.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' did'n' tell him—?

SLIM

W'at de hell yo' take me fo'?

LUCY BELLE

W'at did yo' do?

SLIM

Tol' him I did'n' know nuffin' 'bout yo'.

LUCY BELLE (*gratefully*)

Yo' did, Slim—yo' did—?

SLIM

W'at yo' think I is—some kin'-a fool dat has
ter be tol' w'at ter say?

LUCY BELLE

No, no, Slim. But I thought maybe yo' might-a
been scar't—an' say somefin' fo' yo' think.

SLIM (*with a sneer*)

Take somebody mo' den him ter scare me.

LUCY BELLE

W'at did he do?

GOAT ALLEY

SLIM

Say he gwine ter fin' yo'—he don' care how long it takes.

LUCY BELLE (*with a cry of anguish and indignation*)
He bettah lay off me—!

SLIM

Say he gwine ter bus' hell out-a yo' ef yo' don' come back ter him.

LUCY BELLE

He ain' gwine ter do nuffin'—!

SLIM

Picks up a fence rail an' comes at me—kase I would'n' tell him whar yo' is—!

LUCY BELLE

Oh, mah Gawd! Hit yo'—?

SLIM (*with contempt*)

Been in de undertaker's now ef he had.

LUCY BELLE

Did yo' bus' him—?

SLIM

I picks up a brick an' dares him ter come at me. Mink Hall an' some of mah oder buddies comes 'long right den an' he beats it. (*With a laugh.*) Mink makes a grab fo' him an' he jumps th'u' a stable window.

LUCY BELLE

Ain' seen or heard-a him fo' so long—I been hopin' dat he gone away fo' good.

SLIM

Been follerin' de races—norf an' souf—fo' de las' yeah—so he say—an' jes' got in town yester-day.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

I knows he ain' been 'roun' Wash'nin'. (*Twining and intertwining her fingers, and her gaze roving abstractedly about.*) I don' care. He ain' gwine ter do nuffin'. Me an' Sam'll be livin' in Baltimo' soon—maybe dis time nex' monf—

SLIM

Watch yo'se'f—.

LUCY BELLE

I sho' is gwine ter!

SLIM

Don' go travelin' roun' at night by yo'se'f.

LUCY BELLE (*shaking her head*)

Don' yo' worry—I ain' gwine ter take no chances. (*A sudden look of apprehension coming into her face.*) He gwine ter beat it right ovah ter Carter Street—

SLIM

Nobody ovah dere know whar yo' livin'.

LUCY BELLE

Nobody—nobody 'cept— (*She breaks off and stares fixedly before her.*)

SLIM

Who—?

LUCY BELLE

Lizzie Gibbs.

(*Aunt Rebecca enters, Left, and closes the door carefully after her.*)

AUNT REBECCA (*discovering Slim*)

H'yo', Slim.

SLIM (*shortly*)

'Lo Aun' Becky.

GOAT ALLEY

AUNT REBECCA

How is yo'?

SLIM

Fine an' dandy.

AUNT REBECCA (*to Lucy Belle*)

Done put dem chillen ter bed fo' yo'.

LUCY BELLE (*gratefully, as she goes to her*)

Thank yo', Aun' Becky,—sartainly mighty good-a yo'.

AUNT REBECCA

Dat's all right. Israel 'sleep already—

LUCY BELLE

Bof so tired dey could'n' hardly stan' up.

(*Aunt Rebecca moves toward the door, Back.*)

LUCY BELLE

Yo' ain' gwine—?

AUNT REBECCA

Mus', chile. Jes' drap in on mah way ter de sto'. Oughter been on mah way long fo' dis.

LUCY BELLE

W'en I see yo' agin?

AUNT REBECCA

May drap in later on dis evenin'.

LUCY BELLE

Do, honey, please—!

AUNT REBECCA (*in a low voice—as they pause at the door*)

Did'n' put nuffin' ovah on yo', did she—?

LUCY BELLE

No, indeedy! An' she ain' gwine ter!

AUNT REBECCA

Dat's talkin'! See yo' some mo'.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Yas, yas. Goodbye.

SLIM

See yo' some mo', Aun' Becky.

AUNT REBECCA

Goodbye. (*She goes out, Back.*)

(*Lucy Belle closes the door and returns, slowly to Center. Slim has dropped into a chair, Right Center, and sits nonchalantly puffing away at his cigarette.*)

SLIM (*casually*)

Luce—

LUCY BELLE

Yas—?

SLIM

I'se broke.

LUCY BELLE

Dat ain' doin' me no good.

SLIM

I ain' had nuffin' ter eat since dis mawnin'.

LUCY BELLE (*irritably*)

I kain't he'p dat.

SLIM

Len' me a couple-a dollahs.

LUCY BELLE

I ain' got no money ter len' ter yo'.

SLIM

Yas, yo' is—!

LUCY BELLE

Git out an' git yo'se'f a job.

SLIM

I is got a job.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*incredulously*)

Whar—?

SLIM

At de race track.

LUCY BELLE

W'at doin'—?

SLIM

Feedin' hosses an' rubbin' 'em down.

LUCY BELLE

Den w'at yo' come 'roun' yere askin' me fo' money—?

SLIM

I only had it free days—an' dey don' pay till Saturday.

LUCY BELLE

I give yo' a couple-a dollahs las' Monday.

SLIM

Yo' 'spec' dat ter las' me a week?

LUCY BELLE

I keeps givin' yo' money an' givin' yo' money an' yo' ain' nevah pay me back a nickel.

SLIM

I been playin' in hard luck.

LUCY BELLE

So is I.

SLIM (*rising*)

Yo' got money.

LUCY BELLE

Don' make no diff'rence weder I is or weder I ain'—.

SLIM

Ain' I jes' tol' yo' 'bout Jeff Bisbee—?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

No mo' den yo' had a right ter do!

SLIM

I did'n' haf ter boder 'bout comin' in yere.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' be de meanes' niggah in Wash'nin' ef yo'
had'n'!

SLIM

Go on—he'p me out dis time.

LUCY BELLE

I tol' yo' Monday dat I ain' gwine ter give yo'
no mo' money!

SLIM (*hotly*)

De nex' time I keep mah mouf shet!

LUCY BELLE (*angrily*)

Keep it shet!

SLIM

Yo' damn right I will!

LUCY BELLE

An' keep yo' face out-a dis house! (*Harshly, as she surveys him with a glare.*) Yo' ain' nevah done nuffin' fo' me—nuffin' at all!

SLIM

Yo' lie—! Ef it had'n' been fo' me yo' been cleaned up a dozen times.

LUCY BELLE (*with a derisive laugh*)

Listen ter yo'!

SLIM

W'at 'bout dat time yo's sick—?

LUCY BELLE

Yo' wuk fo' a week—an', buy de stuff we eat.
Nevah give me a cent!

GOAT ALLEY

SLIM

Yo' died ef it had'n' been fo' me!

LUCY BELLE

Been sick a dozen times since den an' yo' ain' raised a han' ter he'p me! (*Harshly.*) Yo' ain' no good, Slim—an' yo' ain' nevah gwine ter be no good—less yo' change mighty quick. Yo' nevah keeps a job ovah a week. All yo' is good fo' is ter guzzle gin, shoot crap an' chase gals—

SLIM

Go on blackguardin' me—ef yo' lookin' fo' trouble!

LUCY BELLE

I'se tellin' de truf—an' yo' knows I is!

SLIM (*loudly*)

I tol' yo' I ain' had nuffin' ter eat since dis mawnin'.

LUCY BELLE

I'll go down ter de sto' an' git some stuff.

SLIM

I ain' got time ter hang 'roun' yere while yo' cooks it.

LUCY BELLE

All yo' wan's dat two dollahs fo' is ter git in a crap game.

SLIM (*advancing toward her menacingly*)

Gimme some money!

LUCY BELLE (*defiantly*)

Nuffin' doin'!

SLIM

Gimme it! Yo' yere—?

LUCY BELLE

I give yo' nuffin'!

GOAT ALLEY

SLIM (*grabbing her by the wrist*)
Come on! Gimme two dollahs!

LUCY BELLE (*fiercely*)
No, no—! Slim—le' go! W'at's de mattah wid yo'! Le' go!

SLIM
Gimme it, or I'll twis' yo' damn arm off! (*He slowly twists her wrist.*)

LUCY BELLE (*crying out in pain and fright*)
Oh, mah Gawd! Slim! Slim! Stop—! Le'go!
Don'—I'll kill yo' fo' dis!

SLIM (*between his teeth*)
Git it! Git it!

LUCY BELLE
Slim! Fo' Gawd's sake! Oh, mah soul—don'—don'— (*Writhing with torture, she sinks to her knees.*)

SLIM
Yo' wan' me ter twis' it off—?

LUCY BELLE (*choking with pain*)
A-all right—Stop! All right, Slim. I'll git it fo' yo'!

SLIM
Will yo'—?

LUCY BELLE
Yas, yas. Stop—please—! Lemme up—lemme up—Slim—

(*He slowly turns her wrist back to normal and relaxing his grip somewhat allows her to rise. She stands limp and dazed for several moments, as though endeavoring to pull herself together. She draws her free hand slowly across her forehead.*)

GOAT ALLEY

SLIM (*with savage impatience*)

Come on!

(*He tightens his hold somewhat. She gives a little cry of pain, and her knees give. With Slim still gripping her wrist, she moves unsteadily to table, Center.*)

LUCY BELLE

All right—all right, Slim. I'll git it fo' yo'—.

(*He drops her wrist. She opens the small drawer of the table and takes out an old and worn leather pocket book. She extracts two one-dollar bills, hands them to him, then deftly stuffs the pocket book down in one of her stockings. Slim jams the bills into his pocket, turns and moves swiftly to the door, Back, and goes out.*)

LUCY BELLE (*crying out after him*)

Yo's a dirty dog! I—I'll git yo' fo' dat—!

(*Lucy Belle sinks down into a chair and covers her face with her hands. She looks up once and her face presents the picture of fierce, tearful rage. Presently a knock sounds on the door, Back. Lucy Belle jumps up with a start. The knock sounds again.*)

LUCY BELLE (*in faltering tones*)

Come in!

(*The door opens and Chick Avery enters. He is a weak-faced, but passably good-looking mulatto, of about thirty-five. He wears a suit of smart clothes, somewhat the worse for wear. His feet are encased in a pair of patent leather shoes which are slit about*

GOAT ALLEY

the toes to relieve the pressure on those members. He is partially bald, but what remains of his straight, jet-black hair is shiny from the generous use of hair oil, and is carefully brushed to cover the bald spots as much as possible. His manner for the most part, is extremely urbane and, by fits and starts, exuberantly mirthful.)

CHICK (*doing a sort of clog dance toward her*)

H'yo', Luce—!

LUCY BELLE (*exclaiming in mild surprise*)

Why—why, 'lo, Chick—!

CHICK

How's de baby—?

LUCY BELLE

Pretty good, I reckon.

CHICK

All by yo' lonesome—?

LUCY BELLE

Look like it, don' it?

CHICK

W'at d'yo' know—?

LUCY BELLE

Nuffin' much—! (*He puts his arm around her and attempts to draw her to him.*) Stop yo' foolin'—! (*She pulls away from him.*)

CHICK

Ain' yo' got a kiss fo' me?

LUCY BELLE

I'll bus' yo' in de nose, Chick Avery!

CHICK

Mah soul, but yo' gittin' skittish—! How much dey cos' now?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Mo' den yo' kin pay.

CHICK (*with an explosive laugh*)

Sam got yo' gwine, ain' he?

LUCY BELLE

Good thin's come high.

CHICK

Yo' said somefin'! (*Sitting on the edge of the table.*) How he makin' out in Baltimo'—?

LUCY BELLE

Who—?

CHICK

Sam.

LUCY BELLE

Oh—oh, he ain' makin' out so bad.

CHICK

Git home often?

LUCY BELLE

Onct or twict a week—depen's on hard dey's wukkin' him.

CHICK

An' yo' stick home an' wuks yo' haid off.

LUCY BELLE (*shortly*)

I does mah share.

CHICK

Nevah seen yo' lately w'en yo' was'n' played out from wukkin' yo' haid off.

LUCY BELLE (*querulously*)

None-a yo' bus'ness how hard I wuks!
(*Sharply.*) W'at yo' doin' now?

CHICK

Barbarin'. Jes' git a job on de Norfolk boat.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

W'at doin'?

CHICK

Same thin'—barbarin'. Dey's got two chairs. I'se gwine ter run one-a dem. Starts in nex' week. Got a chanct ter make some real money, now.

LUCY BELLE

Sho' soun' like a mighty good job.

CHICK (*pointedly*)

Yo' allas tied up ter some niggah dat make yo' wuk like hell.

LUCY BELLE

Shet up! Yo' don' know w'at yo' 's talkin' 'bout. Ev'body got ter wuk hard dese days ter git by.

CHICK (*satirically*)

Is dey?

LUCY BELLE

Ef dey's any good, dey is! W'at yo' gittin' at anyway?

CHICK

I'se allas been yo' lef' han'ed budigee—.

LUCY BELLE

'Deed yo' ain' been nuffin' but a frien'!

CHICK

Dat's w'at I means. (*With a significant smile.*)

Ef I been yo' real budigee, I sho' nevah make yo' wuk like yo' is!

LUCY BELLE (*derisively*)

No! Yo'd make me wuk like a dog.

CHICK

Not on yo' life!

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Make me git out an hussle while yo' lays home
an' guzzle gin.

(They both laugh explosively. Lucy Belle unbends somewhat.)

CHICK (surveying her critically)

Yo' gittin' ole, Luce—

LUCY BELLE (sharply)

So is yo'! Look at dat damned ole haid ob yo's.
Noder yeah an' yo' won' have a hair lef'.

CHICK (gives an explosive laugh, and runs a hand
over his head)

Dat's no lie! (Throwing back his shoulders.)
De older I gits de bettah I feels.

LUCY BELLE

So does I!

CHICK (pointedly)

Been ter any dances?

LUCY BELLE

Don' care nuffin' 'bout dancin' no mo'.

CHICK (with a little exclamation of incredulity)

Uster be crazy 'bout it!

LUCY BELLE

Uster be crazy 'bout a lot-a thin's.

CHICK

Membah dat dance ob de Golden Eagle Club
at de ole Mawnin' Star?

LUCY BELLE (with a reminiscent smile)

Sho' do—!

CHICK

Somebody th'u' a beer bottle—

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*in joyous memory*)

An' miss yo' by free inches!

(*They both laugh uproariously.*)

CHICK

Mah soul! Dat was some night! Git home
'bout seven o'clock in mawnin'.

LUCY BELLE (*with just a note of wistfulness in her tones*)

Still have dances up dere?

CHICK (*exclaiming*)

Do dey? 'Bout ev'y night. (*In ardent admiration.*) Yo's de bes' lil' dancer I evah knowed.

LUCY BELLE

Go 'long! (*She drops down into a chair, gives a little sigh and stares abstractedly into space.*)

CHICK

Membah de time we goes down ter Rivahview
an' comin' home de ole boat gits stuck on dem
mud flats dere by de Eastern Branch—?

LUCY BELLE

'Deed I does! (*In ecstatic memory.*) We dance
on de deck—in de moonlight—

CHICK (*with a rapturous chuckle*)

Ole Beverly Johnson chase Mink Hall wid a
razor—

LUCY BELLE (*laughing*)

Mink jump ovahboard an' swim ter shore!

CHICK (*laughing*)

Great day! An' membah de fair down at—er—
lessee—Manassas?

LUCY BELLE (*nodding*)

Eat chicken an' duck an' co'n pone an' ice

GOAT ALLEY

cream till I neahly bus'! Ride on de merry-go-round—shoot de shoots—an' sing an' dance till I kain't hardly stan' up—! Den dey was preachin' ovah in de grove at night—(*She breaks off—lost in the romantic memory of it.*)

CHICK

Bet yo' ain' had no times like dem since!

LUCY BELLE (*deprecatingly*)

I was jes' a kid den.

CHICK

Dere's gwine ter be a dance at de Mawnin' Star termorrer night.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' gwine—?

CHICK

Sho'! Come on an' go wid me.

LUCY BELLE (*shaking her head*)

Nuffin' doin'.

CHICK (*earnestly*)

Come on! W'at's dis settin' 'roun' de house gittin' yo'—? Jes' dis onct fo' ole times' sake.

LUCY BELLE (*shaking her head more emphatically*)

Nuffin' doin', Chick. No use ter axe me.

CHICK (*slides off the table and moves to her side*)

Luce—jes' dis onct—!

LUCY BELLE (*loudly*)

No—!

(*Pause. Chick surveys her ruefully. Lucy Belle glowers at him.*)

CHICK (*at length*)

Den come on ovah ter Gerner's an' have a glass-a gin.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Not ternight, Chick.

CHICK

Yo' tired—an' it set yo' up great.

LUCY BELLE

Not ternight.

CHICK

Dey got a phonograph in de back room an' we kin have a couple-a lil' dances. Ef yo' kain't go ter de Mawnin' Star—yo' kin leas' git yo'se'f in a lil' dance ovah dere.

LUCY BELLE

No, no—!

CHICK

Come on! Jes' fo' ole times' sake! Good Lawd, yo' got ter git out an' have a lil' fun now an' den. Yo' kain't stick home yere all de time! *(Puts a hand on her arm.)* Come on, baby—!

LUCY BELLE

Nuffin' doin'—!

(A loud knock sounds on the door, Back. Lucy Bell jumps up and stands listening.)

CHICK *(in a low voice)*

Who dat—?

LUCY BELLE *(shaking her head)*

Don' know.

(The person outside kicks the door violently. An expression of dire apprehension comes into Lucy Belle's face. She swings about, points at the door, Left, and speaks in peremptory tones.)

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Git in dere a minute.

CHICK (*in low, guarded tones as he hurries toward Left*)

Is it Sam—?

(*She shakes her head. Chick goes out, Left. Lucy Belle, after a moment or two of deliberation, advances warily toward the door, Back. When almost there she halts again, as though debating whether or not to answer the door. Suddenly the kicking is renewed with increased vigor. Lucy Belle draws back shudderingly, as though to turn and flee. Abruptly the door opens and Jeff Bisbee lunges in. He slams the door shut after him. He is a short, stocky Negro of about thirty—brown in color—with a short, thick neck, a bullet head and a mean, leering manner.*)

LUCY BELLE (*with a gasp of terror*)

Jeff—!

JEFF

I knowed I'd find yo'—! (*Swaying toward her menacingly.*) W'at yo' leave me fo'?

LUCY BELLE

Yo' know why—!

JEFF

Sneak off like a cat—!

LUCY BELLE

I was starvin' ter deaf—.

JEFF

Like hell yo' was!

LUCY BELLE

Yo' was'n' wukkin—.

GOAT ALLEY

JEFF

Yo' know why!

LUCY BELLE

Yo' did'n' want ter—!

JEFF

I'll bus' yo' in de mouf! (*Takes a step toward her.*) I was havin' some hard luck den.

LUCY BELLE

Dat's w'at yo' allas say. It was allas hard luck—or somefin'!

JEFF (*pulls back an arm as though to strike her*)

Yo' knows I was! Could'n' git nuffin'—!

LUCY BELLE

Yo' did'n' ha'f try.

JEFF

Yo' lie—! Times was hard. Look fo' a monf—an' could'n' fin' nuffin'—! (*As though he were on the point of leaping upon her and choking her.*) Watched yo' chanct—did'n' yo'—?

LUCY BELLE

No, no—!

JEFF

Watched yo' chanct—an' run—! Did'n' stop ter figur' w'at I'd done fo' yo'—!

LUCY BELLE (*with a cry of derision*)

Yo' nevah done nuffin' fo' me—!

JEFF

Yo' be on de streets ef it had'n' been fo' me! (*Lucy Belle sneers audibly.*) Did'n' have no mo' sense den a chicken—!

LUCY BELLE

Ain' on 'em now, is I?

GOAT ALLEY

JEFF

It ain' yo' fault—!

LUCY BELLE (*her tones gradually becoming more and more tremulous*)

Yo' crazy—!

JEFF

Watch till mah back is tuhned—an' run ter anoder niggah.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' dreamin'—!

JEFF

I got de dope on yo'—an' got it right—!

LUCY BELLE

Yo' think yo' have—!

JEFF

Yo' come yere ter Sam—!

LUCY BELLE

No, no—!

JEFF

Come yere ter dat damned ole loon! Beat it ter de man dat git me sent up! Dat's de way yo' pay me back, huh—?

LUCY BELLE

Yo' don' know w'at yo' talkin' 'bout—!

JEFF

Livin' yere wid him—!

LUCY BELLE

No, no—!

JEFF (*savagely*)

Don' yo' go lyin' ter me—! I knows! Yo' kain't put nuffin' ovah on me! (*She starts to back away from him.*) Yo' yere—? (*He grabs her by the arm.*)

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*pulling away from him*)

Jeff—please—

JEFF (*menacingly*)

Come yere—!

LUCY BELLE (*getting around to the other side of the table*)

Jeff—please—

JEFF

Yo' gwine wid me—!

LUCY BELLE

No, no—!

JEFF

An' yo' gwine damn quick!

LUCY BELLE

Jeff—fo' Gawd's sake—!

JEFF

I'se gwine back ter Havre de Grace in de mawnin' an' yo' gwine wid me—!

LUCY BELLE (*defiantly*)

I ain' gwine nowhar wid yo'!

(*Jeff reaches in a back pocket, whips out a knife, snaps open the blade, and poises it in the air.*)

JEFF

I'll cut yo' God-damn heart out!

LUCY BELLE (*terror-stricken as he makes a move to come around after her*)

Oh, mah Gawd, Jeff—! Don'—don'—! (*Puts a hand to her throat, and glances wildly about, struggling for self-control.*) Jes'a minute—

JEFF (*savagely*)

Come on—!

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Mah clothes—!

JEFF

Git 'em—git 'em!

LUCY BELLE

An' de chillen—!

JEFF

Ter hell wid dem—!

LUCY BELLE

Got—got ter leave 'em wid somebody.

JEFF (*sardonically*)

Leave 'em wid Sam.

LUCY BELLE (*as though she hadn't heard his remark*)

Got ter leave 'em wid somebody dat kin see after 'em right.

JEFF

Git busy den!

LUCY BELLE (*after a moment of tense, anguished deliberation*)

I—I reckon I could leave 'em wid Aun' Becky—

JEFF

Who she?

LUCY BELLE

Ole woman—live down de alley yere.

JEFF

Hussle.

LUCY BELLE (*after a moment of hesitancy*)

Dey're in yere. Got ter git 'em ready. (*Moves swiftly toward the door, Left. Jeff takes a step or two, as though he were going to follow her. She pauses as she places a hand on the door knob.*) Only take a minute.

GOAT ALLEY

(She opens the door quickly, slides out and closes it. Something about her manner and the quickness with which she closes the door rouse Jeff's suspicions. He stands—body tense—glaring after her. Absolute silence ensues. The lock in the door clicks. With a cry of rage Jeff leaps forward and tries to force the door open.)

JEFF (*ferociously*)

Open de do'! Open it—or I'll knock yo' haid off! Open it! (*Muttering and cursing to himself he puts his shoulder against it and presses hard, but it fails to yield.*) Open up! Open up!

(Baffled, at length he turns away, springs to Left Center, and grabs up a chair. Realizing, however, that it is perhaps not quite heavy enough for his purpose, he slowly sets it down, stands with his hands resting on its back, and looks about in search of a more formidable weapon. Suddenly shouts, the footsteps of people running, and the noises of panicky commotion issue from the alley, immediately off stage, Back. It proceeds down the alley, Left, and the noise rapidly lessens in volume, and distinctness. All at once the door, Back, bursts open and Slim dashes in. He bangs the door shut after him, and stands wild-eyed and breathing heavily.)

JEFF

W'at's de mattah—?

SLIM (*with a gulp—as he recognizes Jeff*)

Po-po-lice!

GOAT ALLEY

JEFF (*lowering his voice and becoming markedly wary and tense*)

Po-lice—? Who dey aftah?

SLIM

Raid Messer's stable—down de alley yere—

(*Someone runs heavily down the alley. Slim springs back and stands in a crouching attitude. Jeff leaps over to the table and blows the light out.*)

JEFF

Crap game—?

SLIM

Yas.

JEFF

Git anabody?

SLIM

Don' know.

(*The noise and clatter recede continually, off Left. At length Slim advances cautiously to the door, Back, opens it and peers out. Jeff goes over and stands near him.*)

SLIM

At de oder end-a de alley, now.

JEFF

See yo' w'en yo' runs?

SLIM

Sho'—! Slew-foot know me, too. He one-a dem. Liable ter come back dis way an' search ev'y house.

(*He opens the door wider and leans far out. A pale light filters in from Back. The silhouetted*

GOAT ALLEY

figures of the two men can be plainly seen. Jeff joins Slim in the doorway and peers out.)

SLIM

I'se gwine ter beat it.

(Slim darts off down the alley, Right. Jeff stands tensely deliberating for several moments. Finally he steps out, and with a swift movement closes the door after him. Almost immediately the door, Left, opens and a broad shaft of light falls across the room from the doorway, Left, to the wall, Right Back. Lucy Belle enters, followed closely by Chick. They leave the door open and pause, Right Back, in the full beat of the light.)

CHICK *(as they move to Right, Back)*

Oughter shot him in his tracks—! *(Taps his hip pocket.)*

LUCY BELLE *(shaking her head violently)*

I done tol' yo' dat yo' done right—stickin' dere an' keepin' yo' mouf shet.

CHICK *(with simulated bravado)*

Sartainly like ter git dat bird.

LUCY BELLE

Gawd, no! Don' wan' no killin's 'roun' yere.

CHICK

Yo' bettah beat it.

LUCY BELLE *(breathing quickly)*

Ain' no place ter go—.

CHICK

Plenty ob 'em—! Hun'erd's—!

LUCY BELLE

Ain'—ain' got no strenf—! *(Draws a hand across her forehead.)*

GOAT ALLEY

CHICK

Buck up! Yo' got ter git out-a yere—!

LUCY BELLE

Oh—oh, Gawd! Somefin' like dis allas got ter happen.

(Chick skips over to the door, Back, opens it and peers up and down the alley.)

LUCY BELLE

See anabody—?

CHICK *(shaking his head)*

No. *(He closes the door and returns swiftly to her.)* He liable ter come back any minute.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' reckon so—?

CHICK

Sho' as yo' bawn!

LUCY BELLE

I kain't go runnin' 'roun' de streets—

CHICK

We kin go ter some place neah.

LUCY BELLE

—Not feelin' like I does.

CHICK

Yo' ain' gwine ter stay yere an' let him kill yo'!

LUCY BELLE

He ain' gwine ter kill me!

CHICK

Damn soon see ef yo' stick yere!

LUCY BELLE

Sho' ter see us in de street.

CHICK

We got a chanct ter run dere.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

He's some runner hisse'f.

CHICK

He ain' gwine ter do nuffin' outside—wid de cops aroun'. (*She deliberates.*) Look at yo'! Tremlin' like a leaf!

LUCY BELLE (*with a little hysterical sob*)

I know—I know—

CHICK

Yo' needs a good swig-a gin—

LUCY BELLE

Ain'—ain' got a bit in de house.

CHICK

Come on ovah ter Gerner's—

LUCY BELLE

Kain't leave de chillen.

CHICK (*with a little laugh—as though recalling her subterfuge with Jeff*)

Carry 'em ovah ter Aun' Becky's.

LUCY BELLE

I know—but yo' see—

CHICK

Yo' crazy ter stick yere—'less yo' wan' me ter hang 'roun' an' plug him fo' yo'—

LUCY BELLE

Nuffin' like dat—!

CHICK

Den come on—! Good drink set yo' up jes' right.

(*Lucy Belle takes a faltering step or two toward the door, Left. Just then someone passes the window, Left Back, and heavy footsteps on the pavement*

GOAT ALLEY

of the alley can be heard. Lucy Belle halts. She turns and faces the door, Back. It opens and Sam Reed enters. He is a big powerful Negro—dark brown in color—and about thirty-five. He wears an old, torn suit of clothes, carries an old felt hat, and is without a collar. His manner is straight-forward, well-meaning, kindly. His movements and speech are deliberate—except when he is angry.)

SAM (peering forward through the dim light at them)
Luce—!

LUCY BELLE (with a cry of mingled joy and agitation)
Sam—!

SAM (closing the door and moving slowly down to Center)

H'yo'—?

LUCY BELLE (leaps to his side and grabs his arm)
Sam—Sam-boy! Jes' talkin' wid—wid Chick
Avery yere—yo'—yo' knows Chick—

CHICK (circumspectly)

H'yo', Sam.

(Sam glowers at Chick for a moment before replying.)

SAM (at length—with ill grace)
H'yo'—!

LUCY BELLE

Light de lamp, Chick. (To Sam.) Po-lice raid
a crap game down de alley—an'—an' we puts
out de light.

(Chick strikes a match and lights the lamp on the
table, Center.)

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*in eager vibrant tones of affection as she gazes up at him*)

Sam-boy, I'se so glad ter see yo'! How is yo'?

SAM

Pretty good.

LUCY BELLE

Did'n' hardly 'spec' yo' ternight.

SAM

Shower come up an' we quits early.

LUCY BELLE

Gawd bless yo'—! (*Casting about for something to relieve the constraint of the situation somewhat, she spies his hat, grabs it and begins to industriously dust it off with her sleeve.*) Mus'a been playin' football wid dis ole hat.

SAM (*with a contemptuous glance at Chick*)

I'se been doin' a man's wuk.

LUCY BELLE (*with a forced, nervous laugh*)

Been standin' on yo' haid!

CHICK (*doing a light clog dance toward the door, Back*)

On mah way, Luce. See yo' some mo'.

LUCY BELLE

W'at's yo' hurry—?

CHICK

Got some bus'ness ter 'tend ter—ovah at Gerner's. (*Gives an explosive laugh.*)

(*Lucy Belle makes a wry face, and finally breaks into a little nervous giggle.*)

LUCY BELLE

Goodbye, Chick. See yo' some mo'.

GOAT ALLEY

CHICK (*over his shoulder*)

See yo' some mo', Sam.

(*Sam nods glumly and grunts. Chick goes out, Back.*)

SAM (*sharply*)

W'at he doin' 'roun' yere—?

LUCY BELLE

Jes'—jes' drap in ter say "howdy".

SAM

Don' wan' nobody like him hangin' 'roun'.

LUCY BELLE

He—he's an ole frien'-a mine.

SAM (*nodding*)

Damn pool room spoaht!

LUCY BELLE

No, no, Sam-boy! He's a barber—an' makes good money. Wukkin' all de time.

SAM

Nevah seen a barber dat was any good.

LUCY BELLE

He ain' so bad. An' he don' come 'roun' yere—oh, only onct in a long time. (*Glancing toward the door, Left.*) We keep on talkin' like dis, dem chillen wake up an' make a fuss.

(*She hurries over, Left, and closes the door. Sam takes his pipe from his coat pocket, fumbles around in the other outside coat pocket, finds his bag of tobacco, pulls it out and begins painstakingly to fill the pipe. Meanwhile he follows Lucy Belle's movements with an intent, questioning gaze.*)

LUCY BELLE (*coming back to him*)

Honey-baby, been crazy ter see yo'—!

GOAT ALLEY

SAM (*lays his pipe on the table and takes her in his arms*)

Honey-baby! (*Kisses her fondly.*) Mah lil' gal!

LUCY BELLE

Seem ter me I miss yo' mo' an' mo'—!

SAM

Sho' nuff—?

LUCY BELLE

Lonesome yere widout yo'.

SAM (*playfully*)

Go 'long!

LUCY BELLE (*shaking her head*)

So lonesome some days dat I don' know w'at ter do.

SAM (*patting her cheek*)

Po' lil' baby-budigee—!

LUCY BELLE

Hones', kain't seem ter git uster yo' bein' away.

SAM

Jes' remembah dat I misses yo' as much as yo' does me.

LUCY BELLE

I know, Sam-boy—I knows yo' does!

SAM (*sits in a nearby chair and pulls her over on his knee*)

Tain' gwine ter be dis way long.

LUCY BELLE (*with a little cry of joy*)

Gee, w'en yo' comes home like dis—an' s'prise's me—

SAM (*laughing*)

Make yo' feel good—?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Oh, Gawd—! (*Strokes his hair fondly. Someone passes down the alley. She gives a start.*)

SAM

W'at's de mattah—?

LUCY BELLE (*making a valiant effort to hide her agitation*)

Nuffin'—!

SAM

Yo' mus' got de fidgets.

LUCY BELLE (*nodding*)

Maybe—from bein' yere nights—alone. (*Plainly.*) Oh—oh, Sam-boy, I don' wan' yo' ter go 'way no mo'!

SAM (*with puzzled impatience*)

W'at yo' talkin' 'bout, gal?

LUCY BELLE

I don' wan' yo' ter go ter Baltimo' no mo'—!

SAM

Honey-baby, I got ter git back on de job!

LUCY BELLE

No, yo' ain'—.

SAM

W'at's de mattah wid yo'? Is yo' crazy—?

LUCY BELLE

Dat ain' de onliest job in de worl'—

SAM

Dat don' make no diff'rence.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' kin git somefin' yere.

SAM

Walk de streets agin like I did las' monf?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Thin's ain' so slow now.

SAM

Slower den dey evah was!

LUCY BELLE

So hard on me bein' yere alone—an' wid de
chillen.

SAM

Kain't he'p it, honey-baby. Jes' got ter keep
gwine 'long like we is—'till thin's break bettah.

LUCY BELLE

Wukkin' hard—?

SAM

Sho' is!

LUCY BELLE

Diggin' in de streets ain' no kind-a job fo' yo'.

SAM

Bettah den nuffin'.

LUCY BELLE (*feelingly, as she strokes his hair again*)

I knows dat yo' doin' all yo' kin—! Gawd bless
yo'—! But I wan's ter be wid yo', Sam-boy
honey-baby—all de time.

SAM (*his tones vibrant with emotion*)

An' I wan's yo' wid me—!

LUCY BELLE

Den—le's go ter Baltimo—now—

SAM

W'at yo' mean—?

LUCY BELLE

Next week.

SAM

Next week—?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Er—er maybe de week aftah. We been figurin' on gwine dere all 'long. But le's don' wait till yo' git somefin' steady. Yo' kin' allas git somefin'.

SAM (*turning the thing over in his mind*)

I don' know, honey—

LUCY BELLE

Sho' yo' kin! I don' wan' ter stay yere no longer widout yo'. Please—!

SAM

Cos' a lot ter move.

LUCY BELLE

We could sell off some de furn'ture—an' maybe jes' take rooms—

SAM (*nodding*)

Yas—perhaps.

LUCY BELLE

Sho' we could!

SAM

Got ter fin' de rooms fust.

LUCY BELLE

Dat gwine ter be easy 'nuff.

SAM

Nex' week, yo' say—?

LUCY BELLE

Or de week aftah!

SAM

Make it de week aftah.

LUCY BELLE (*kissing him*)

Yo' will—!

SAM

I reckon so—!

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Gawd bless yo'—!

SAM

Do—do mos' anathin' dat gwine ter' make yo'
happy!

LUCY BELLE (*embracing him*)

Honey-baby! (*Draws back suddenly and searches his face anxiously.*) Is yo' had any suppah? (*He smiles and shakes his head.*) Co'se yo' ain'!
W'at's de mattah wid me! Great day!

SAM

I ain' so hangry.

LUCY BELLE

Hush yo' mouf, an' lemme git down ter dat sto'. (*She grabs up a little shawl from a nearby chair and throws it over her head.*)

SAM

Got any money—?

LUCY BELLE

A lil', I reckon.

(*Sam reaches in his pocket, pulls out a bill and hands it to her.*)

SAM

Yere.

LUCY BELLE

Thanks, honey. Be right back. Ef Israel hol-lers go in dere an' beat him.

(*Sam nods. She goes out hurriedly, Back. Sam reaches over on the table, picks up his pipe and lights it. A knock sounds on the door, Back.*)

SAM

Come in!

GOAT ALLEY

(The door, Back, opens and Lizzie Gibbs enters. Sam twists about to see who it is.)

LIZZIE *(doing a sort of languorous muscle dance as she advances)*

H'yo', Sam?

SAM *(harshly—glowering at her)*

W'at yo' wan'?

LIZZIE *(unctuously)*

I draps 'roun' dis way—now an' den—ter see ole frien's.

SAM *(laying his pipe on the table and rising)*

Yo' does, does yo'?

LIZZIE

Jes' see yo' gittin' off a car down on Four-an'-a ha'f Street. *(She waits a moment or two for him to speak, but he doesn't offer to proceed with the conversation.)* How is yo'?

SAM

All right.

LIZZIE

Long time since I seen yo'.

SAM

Reckon it is.

LIZZIE

Ain' seen yo' since yo' git back from Atlanta.

SAM

No—yo' ain'.

LIZZIE

Tol' me yo' gwine down here fo' a few weeks—!

SAM *(his manner gradually becoming defiant)*

Long as I 'specter ter stay.

GOAT ALLEY

LIZZIE

Yo' nevah come back!

SAM

Got a good job.

LIZZIE

Las' a long time, did'n' it?

SAM

Long as I wan's it!

LIZZIE

Nevah send me wud—or nuffin'—!

SAM

Yo' knows why!

LIZZIE

I wish ter Gawd I did!

SAM

Don' stan' up dere—an' talk like a fool.

LIZZIE

Tell me—tell me—!

SAM

I ain' got no time fo' no gal like yo'.

LIZZIE

Sam—w'at yo' got so agin me?

SAM

Yo' know!

LIZZIE

'Deed I don'!

SAM

I ain' studyin' 'bout no gal dat fights—an'
raises hell—

LIZZIE

I know—sometimes I uster—w'en I got mad—
But I nevah meant no harm, Sam-boy—

GOAT ALLEY

SAM

How 'bout dat time ovah at yo' sistah's?

LIZZIE (*penitently*)

I know, I know—(*Lays a hand on his arm.*)
Fo'give me, Sam—! 'Deed I did'n' mean
nuffin' den!

SAM (*drawing away from her*)

I ain' boderin' 'bout yo', Lizz.

LIZZIE (*passionately*)

Listen, son, ain' yo' gwine ter fo'give yo' ole
budigee?

SAM

Go 'long 'bout yo' bus'ness—.

LIZZIE

I'll give yo' money, Sam—! Give yo' de bes'
eats in de worl'—!

SAM

Shet up!

LIZZIE

Sam—!

SAM

Yo' an' me done call it quits—long time ago.

LIZZIE (*collects herself gradually, and draws back a
step or two with a sardonic leer*)

Done pass me up, huh?

SAM

Yo' yered me.

LIZZIE

Pass me up fo' dis lil' wench.

SAM (*flaring up*)

Who yo' talkin' 'bout?

LIZZIE

Yo' know—!

GOAT ALLEY

SAM

Who—?

LIZZIE

Lucy Belle.

SAM

Don' yo' go blackguardin' her.

LIZZIE

I ain' blackguardin' nobody.

SAM

Den watch yo' step!

LIZZIE

Fell fo' her! Oh, mah Gawd!

SAM

Keep yo' tongue off her!

LIZZIE

I knows her as well as yo' do! Bettah—!

SAM

Yo' don'—!

LIZZIE

I knowed her w'en she live ovah in Carter Street—

SAM

Carter Street—?

LIZZIE (*with a loud, rasping laugh*)

W'en she livin' dere wid Jeff Bisbee—!

SAM (*with a shout which is a mixture of incredulity and menace*)

Livin' wid Jeff Bisbee—!

LIZZIE

Sho'! Big as life.

SAM

Yo' lie—!

GOAT ALLEY

LIZZIE

Ain' she tol' yo'? Oh, mah Gawd! (Gives a *raucous, sardonic laugh.*) Ask her—! She'll tell yo' all 'bout it! I knowed yo'd fall fo' a wench like her!

(*The door, Back, opens and Lucy Belle enters, carrying several small packages. An expression of blank dismay floods her face upon discovering Lizzie.*)

LIZZIE (*regarding her with an expression of leering vengeance*)

H'yo', Luce—!

LUCY BELLE (*in a low, choking voice*)

'Lo—!

(*Sam's eyes are first upon one, then the other, in a gaze of fierce, tigerish scrutiny.*)

LIZZIE (*with a wink and a laugh as she slouches toward the door, Back*)

Great lil' gal, Sam—!

LUCY BELLE (*angrily*)

Yo'—yo'—

LIZZIE

Go on an' say it! I dare yo'—!

SAM (*to Lizzie*)

Shet up!

LIZZIE (*with a leering smile*)

So long, Sam. See yo' some mo'. (*At the door, Back.*) Good beatin' w'at she need!

(*She goes out quickly, Back. Lucy Belle advances to Center, and deposits her packages on the table.*)

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*studying Sam's face with eager, pathetic anxiety*)

Hardes' ole gal in Wash'nin'!

SAM (*fiercely*)

She say yo' live wid Jeff Bisbee—!

LUCY BELLE (*agitatedly*)

She—she say dat—?

SAM (*advancing quickly to her side*)

Did yo'—?

LUCY BELLE

Oh, Sam—I—I—

SAM

Yo' yere me?

LUCY BELLE

She—she hate me like sin—!

SAM

Did yo'—?

LUCY BELLE

Tryin' ter git back at me—!

SAM (*grabs her and jerks her to his side*)

Did yo' live wid him—?

LUCY BELLE

Oh, Sam-boy, honey-baby—! Don'—

SAM

Did yo'—?

LUCY BELLE (*with a sob*)

Oh—oh, Sam—I—I ain' gwine ter lie ter yo'—

SAM (*putting a hand on each of her shoulders, and staring down into her eyes with a look of scarce-believing, burning intensity*)

Took up wid dat dirty skunk—?

LUCY BELLE

He made me—!

GOAT ALLEY

SAM

Yo' lie—!

LUCY BELLE

He did—he did! Say he kill me ef I did'n'—!

SAM

An' yo' let him git away wid it—!

LUCY BELLE

Did'n'—did'n' know w'at ter do—!

SAM (*mockingly*)

Did'n' know w'at ter do!

LUCY BELLE

He kep' aftah me—an' kep' aftah me—

SAM

W'en—w'en?

LUCY BELLE

Aftah Ed leaves me. Yo's in Atlanta.

SAM

An' yo' stick yere?

LUCY BELLE

I was ha'f sick—an' did'n' have no money. He
—he had me so scar't I was neah crazy.

SAM (*in anguish*)

Gawd—!

LUCY BELLE

Ha'f-out-a mah haid, honey—did'n' know w'at
I was doin'—

SAM

Took up wid de wust niggah in de worl'—!

LUCY BELLE

I—I could'n' help it—'deed I could'n'!

SAM

Swo' I nevah touch anathin' or anabody dat he
lay a fingah on.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Dat's de reason I ain' said nuffin'.

SAM (*bitterly*)

I reckon it is!

LUCY BELLE

I knowed how yo' hate him.

SAM (*harshly*)

Dey don' come no wuss.

LUCY BELLE

Treat me like a dog!

SAM

W'at kin'-a crazy fool is yo'?

LUCY BELLE

I done tol' yo'. I was down an' out—an' scar'ter deaf.

SAM (*shaking his head*)

Took up wid him—!

LUCY BELLE

I know, I know—

SAM

Why did'n' yo' kill him?

LUCY BELLE

Gawd, I wan'ed ter—!

SAM

Why did'n' yo'?

LUCY BELLE

Ev'y day I prays dat yo' would come back. An' I thinks 'bout yo' all de time. Sam-boy, honey-baby, dey ain' nevah been anobody but yo'—an' nevah will be! (*Stretching out her arms to him.*) W'en yo' come back it seem too good ter be true.

GOAT ALLEY

SAM

Wish I nevah come back.

LUCY BELLE

Don' say dat, Sam—don'—!

SAM

Whar was yo' livin'—?

LUCY BELLE

Carter Street.

SAM

An' he come ter yo' dere?

LUCY BELLE

Yas.

SAM

An' yo' let's him stay.

LUCY BELLE

Had ter—. (*Sam gives a short, savage laugh.*) I—I only done w'at oder gals would-a done—ef dey been in mah place. I gits away de fust good chanct I gits.

SAM

How long yo' live wid him?

LUCY BELLE

'Bout yeah-an'-a-ha'f. (*In tender, appealing tones.*) Honey-baby, I loves yo'—an' I'se loved yo' all de time—right from de fust. Yo' knows I is! W'en me an' yo' hooks up yere—yo' say w'at is pas' is pas'! Don' yo' membah—? (*Sam nods.*) An' yo' say dat yo' ain' been no angel—an' yo' knows I ain'—

SAM

Did'n' know yo'd been tied up ter anobody like Jeff.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

I done tol' yo' why I did'n' say nuffin'. Oh, Sam-boy, I ain' nevah come back at yo' 'bout ole Lizzie Gibbs. I don' hol' dat agin yo'—even ef she do blackguard an' lie on me. I ain' nevah said nuffin' ter yo' 'bout it. Is I?

SAM

No.

LUCY BELLE

Den don' hol' dis agin me. It all happen fo' me an' yo' hook up fo' good. It's pas' an' gone. Fo'give me. I ain' nevah gwine ter keep nuffin' back agin. Fo'give me, honey-baby—please fo'give me?

SAM (*takes her in his arms and kisses her passionately*)

Mah lil' baby budigee!

LUCY BELLE

Yo' does fo'give me, don' yo'?

SAM

Yas, yas—!

LUCY BELLE

I knowed yo' would.

SAM

Ef yo' evah has anathin' ter do wid anoder niggah I'se gwine ter kill yo'!

LUCY BELLE

No, no, Sam—nevah agin—! Don' yo' worry—!

SAM (*with passionate fervor*)

I loves yo' bettah den anathin' in de worl'—!

LUCY BELLE (*ecstatically*)

Sam-boy budigee!

GOAT ALLEY

SAM

I wants ter go on wukkin' fo' yo'—

LUCY BELLE

Honey-baby!

SAM

An' w'en anathin' like dis come up—

LUCY BELLE

I know, I know—

SAM

Ef it had been anabody but Jeff—

LUCY BELLE

But w'at is pas' is gwine ter be pas'—!

SAM (*repeating*)

W'at is pas' is gwine ter be pas'. An' I'se gwine
on wukkin' fo' yo'—an' tryin' ter make yo'
happy—

LUCY BELLE (*with a sob*)

I knows yo' is, ole Sam-boy, baby!

SAM

Yo's all I got in de worl'.

LUCY BELLE

Yo's all I got!

SAM

By-an'-by we gwine ter git nuff saved ter buy
a lil' place down neah Frederick—mah ole home.

LUCY BELLE

Yas, yas—jes' as soon as we kin—

SAM

An' we gwine down dere an' raise garden truck
—an' chickens—an' *live right*—

LUCY BELLE

Yo' said somefin'!

GOAT ALLEY

SAM

De chillen'll have plenty-a room ter play. An' I kin take a day off now an' go huntin'. (*Wistfully.*) Still got-a lot-a possums down 'roun' dere.

LUCY BELLE

Is dey—?

SAM

Heaps. (*With a sigh.*) Yas, indeedy! We gwine down dere—an' live right!

(*The footsteps of someone coming rapidly down the alley arrest them. Lucy Belle gives a start. They both listen intently. The door, Back, suddenly bursts open and Jeff Bisbee dashes in. He halts abruptly upon discovering Sam and stares at him—his face distorted with rage. Sam breaks away from Lucy Belle and starts at him—menacingly.*)

SAM (*at the top of his voice*)

Git out-a yere!

(*Lucy Belle gives a cry of anguish and fear and draws back, toward Left, cowering.*)

JEFF (*drawing a knife and snapping open the blade*)
Who yo' talkin' ter?

SAM

Ter yo'!

LUCY BELLE (*rushes forward, as though to place herself between them*)

Jeff—! Fo' Gawd's sake!

JEFF

Thought I'd find yo' yere!

GOAT ALLEY

SAM (*thunderously*)

Git out—!

(Jeff lunges at Sam. Lucy Belle gives a blood-curdling shriek. The men grapple and sway about the room, grunting and cursing.)

LUCY BELLE

Oh, mah Gawd! Po-lice! Po-lice! Murder!

(Sam has a firm grip on Jeff's right arm. After some desperate maneuvering, Jeff contrives to swing it down in an attempt to stab Sam in the side. Sam diverts the thrust and the blade plunges into Jeff's side. Jeff gives a groan, his body becomes limp, his knees sag, the muscles of his hand relax and the knife falls to the floor. Sam releases him and he staggers toward the table, Center. He makes a grab for it, misses it, and falls to the floor. He raises himself on one elbow, puts his free hand to his side, and lies there groaning and rolling his eyes. Sam and Lucy Belle stand gazing down at him—terror-stricken.)

LUCY BELLE (*in wild, hysterical tones*)

Sam—run! Git out—git out fo' yo' life!

(At this juncture a policeman dashes in, Back. He pauses near the door for a second, sees Jeff lying on the floor, turns, discovers Sam, springs over and grabs him.)

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same as Act I—one year later. Early afternoon.

A moment after the rise of the curtain Lucy Belle enters, Left, carrying her hat and jacket. She advances to Center and lays them on the table. Her walk is listless and her eyes are bright with nervous fatigue. She glances at the alarm clock which stands on top of the cupboard, Left Center. The hands point to half-past twelve. She drops down in a chair to the left of the table and stares dismally before her. Presently she rests her elbows on her knees, bends forward, covers her face with her hands and gives way to a series of dry, racking sobs.

LUCY BELLE (*looking up eventually with a face full of woe*)

Sam! Mah ole Sam-boy—come back ter me!
Ain' yo' evah gwine ter come back? Honey-
baby! Mah own honey-baby, buddy boy!

(From off stage, Right, as though proceeding from the upstairs room come the weird, discordant, thin strains of a hymn played on an old wheezy organ, and an old Negro can be heard singing it in deep, unsteady tones. Lucy Belle becomes momentarily composed and sits listening as though the music soothed her. In the course of several moments she rises, goes to the mirror which hangs on the wall, Right, and stands before it wiping her eyes and adjusting her hair.

GOAT ALLEY

Presently the music stops, and someone can be heard coming slowly and heavily down the stairs, Right. Abruptly the door, Right, opens and old man Pocher enters. He is a very old Negro with white hair and a face seamed with wrinkles. His back is quite bent and he walks with the aid of a heavy, gnarled stick. His manner is a combination of the patriarchal-Calvinistic, and that of the homely, old, ante-bellum house servant. He wears an old black suit of clothes, green with age, and carries an old and very dusty felt hat.)

LUCY BELLE

H'yo', Mistah Pocher!

POCHER

Howdy, chile—howdy! Ain' yo' wukkin' ter-day?

LUCY BELLE

Sho'! Jes' home fo' a lil' while. Gwine back d'rectly.

POCHER (*with stern resentment*)

Dem boys skylarkin' agin las' night—!

LUCY BELLE

Gawd sakes—!

POCHER

Put salt on de do'step—!

LUCY BELLE

De dirty devils—!

POCHER

Secon' time dis week! Wust neighborhood I'se evah in!

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

'Deed I'se gwine ter stay home ternight an' git 'em.

POCHER (*fiercely*)

Git so many evil sparits 'roun' dat dey choke yo' ter deaf in yo' sleep.

LUCY BELLE

Ef dey don' stop I'se gwine ter put de *po*-lice on 'em.

POCHER

Dey wuk on me night fo' las'—

LUCY BELLE

Who?

POCHER

Evil sparits! Wuk on me till I kain't hardly breafe. Yo' yere me wrestlin' wid 'em?

LUCY BELLE

Gawd, no!

POCHER

Ain' gwine ter put up wid it no longer.

LUCY BELLE

'Deed I don' want yo' ter, Mistah Pocher.

POCHER (*vehemently*)

Ain' gwine ter! All dey is 'bout it!

LUCY BELLE

Boys in dis alley ain' had no bringin' up.

POCHER (*advancing to the door, Back*)

Salt on de do'step wust thin' in de worl' ter bring evil sparits 'roun'.

LUCY BELLE

Yas, indeedy! I knows it is.

POCHER (*at the door, Back*)

Gwine down ter de sto'. Reckon I be right back.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*nodding*)

Make up yo' bed fo' yo' d'rectly.

(*Pocher nods and grunts and goes out, Back, closing the door after him. Lucy Belle stands for a moment, pondering, and a thin smile plays over her face. At length she turns and moves listlessly toward the door, Right. As she reaches there, comes the sound of boyish shouts and laughter and the shuffling of feet about the door, Back. Lucy Belle pauses and listens. She scowls darkly, hurries to the door, and throws it open. This is followed immediately by the clatter of scurrying feet and taunting shouts as those who were about the door run rapidly down the alley.*)

LUCY BELLE (*standing in the doorway and shouting angrily after them*)

I seen yo' Jack Kramer! Yo' too, Lippy an' Mule! Keep away from yere or I'se gwine ter wring yo' damn necks! Yas, yo's—Lippy! I ain' scar't of none-a yo'! Quit skylarkin' 'roun' dis door! Sweah out-a warran' fo' yo', too!

(*She stands glaring off Left at them. Slim suddenly appears from Right.*)

SLIM

H'yo', Luce!

LUCY BELLE (*shortly, as she steps back into the room*)

'Lo, Slim.

SLIM (*entering, Back, and noting her ill-humor*)

W'at's de mattah?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*closing the door*)

Oh, dat Jack an' Lippy an' Mule is allas sky-larkin' 'roun' mah do'.

SLIM

Tryin' ter git back at yo'?

LUCY BELLE (*shaking her head*)

Makin' out ter plague ole man Pocher.

SLIM

Git somefin' on him?

LUCY BELLE (*nodding*)

Gits wise dat he scar't ter deaf ob evil sparits—an' bein' conjuhed.

SLIM

Sho' nuff!

LUCY BELLE

Lil' while aftah he rents dis room—an' been aftah him evah since. Puts salt on de do'step an' ev'thin' like dat.

SLIM

Bus' 'em in de haid.

LUCY BELLE

Do wuss' an dat ef dey keeps on.

SLIM

Clean up fo' 'em!

LUCY BELLE

I sho' gwine ter ef dey don' lay off him! (*In tones of pondering indignation and protest.*) Dat room is hard ter rent. Ole man Pocher is kep' it longer den anobody. (*Slim nods.*) Two mon's dere could'n' rent it at all—an' ole Jennie Wurmser goes off owin' me fo' five weeks.

SLIM

How long Pocher been yere?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Free mon's.

SLIM

He sing too much.

LUCY BELLE

Ain' boderin' 'bout dat so long as I gits mah
money ev'y Monday mawnin'.

SLIM

Whar he git his money?

LUCY BELLE

Son in New York send it ter him. I couldn'
hardly git by now widout somefin' like dat
comin' in reg'lar ev'y week.

SLIM

Wukkin' now?

LUCY BELLE

Sho' I'se wukkin!

SLIM

Whar?

LUCY BELLE

Fo' Moy Wing—up on Seventh Street.

SLIM

Chink—? (*Lucy Belle nods.*) W'at doin'?

LUCY BELLE

Washin' an' iron'. W'at yo' think?

SLIM

Steady?

LUCY BELLE

Free times a week—Monday, We'nesday, an'
Friday.

SLIM

Dat ain' no kin'-a job.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Yo' go out an' git me a bettah one.

SLIM (*with a laugh*)

Sho'—!

LUCY BELLE

An' git yo'se'f one an' keep it.

SLIM

Been in hospital.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' ain' dere now.

SLIM

I git one quick 'nuff. Don' yo' worry.

LUCY BELLE

Git it!

SLIM

Dem Chinks is crazy 'bout Niggahs an' white people's hearts.

LUCY BELLE

Go 'long!

SLIM

Sho! Dey kills yo', cuts out yo' heart, an' eats it. Ef yo' eats a heart nobody kin cunjuh yo'— an' each one dat yo' eat give yo' a yeah's luck.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' crazy! I knowed Moy Wing 'long time.

SLIM

Kain't trus' none ob 'em.

LUCY BELLE

I ain' scar't-a him. He ain' gwine ter do nuffin' ter me. (*Shakes her head.*) Onlies' kin'-a job dat do fo' me right now.

SLIM

How yo' make dat out?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Kain't stay 'way from de chillen all de time.
(*Sighs and drops down in a chair. Draws a hand across her forehead.*) Gawd—!

SLIM

W'at's de mattah?

LUCY BELLE

I'se tired. Wash dis mawnin'. Got ter go back dis aftahnoon an' iron.

SLIM

Wuk yo' ter deaf.

LUCY BELLE

Be twict'as hard ef I'se wukkin' ev'y day. (*With a little wistful cry.*) Ef—ef Sam was only yere—den—den I would'n' care how hard I haf ter wuk—or 'bout nuffin'—(*Staring abstractedly into space.*) Be a yeah de fust-a nex' monf since he wen' ter jail.

SLIM

Sho' nuff—!

LUCY BELLE (*shaking her head*)

Seem like five yeahs.

(*Pause. Lucy Belle sits staring into space. Slim nonchalantly rolls a cigarette.*)

SLIM

W'at become ob Jeff?

LUCY BELLE

I'don' know. Dey nevah done nuffin' ter him. He was in de hospital fo' a while. He lef' town soon as he gits out an' I ain' nevah seen him since.

SLIM (*at length, as he lights the cigarette*)

How long is Sam up fo'?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Fo' yeahs—!

SLIM

Maybe he git out sooner—fo' bein' good. Kain't tell.

LUCY BELLE (*jumping up with an eager cry and searching his face*)

Yo'—yo' think so, Slim?

SLIM

Dey does sometimes.

LUCY BELLE

How—how soon yo' think dey let him out?

SLIM

Don' know. Yo' nevah kain tell.

LUCY BELLE

Maybe in anoder yeah?

SLIM

Ef he have any luck.

LUCY BELLE (*clasping her hands tightly together and raising her eyes heavenward*)

Oh, Gawd! Ef he only do—! I kin make out fo' 'noder yeah ef I keeps wukkin' fo' Moy—an' washin' extra yere at home like I is—an' ef I keeps de room rented right 'long.

SLIM

Yo' ain' gwine ter have no trouble.

LUCY BELLE

Ef Pocher only keep dat room an' pay me reg'lar. (*Old man Pocher is heard grumbling and grunting to himself immediately outside the door, off stage, Back.*) Yere he come now!

GOAT ALLEY

(The door, Back, opens and Pocher enters, carrying a small package under his arms. He stands in the doorway and points angrily with his cane at the doorstep.)

POCHER

Look dere! Look! Yo' see—!

LUCY BELLE

W'at—?

POCHER *(trembling with anger and fear)*

Salt on de do'step agin!

LUCY BELLE

Gawd sakes!

POCHER

Tol' yo' I was'n' gwine ter put up wid it no longer!

LUCY BELLE

I did'n' know dey done it.

POCHER

Yo' bus'ness ter watch 'em!

LUCY BELLE

I does try ter.

POCHER

Oughter put de po-lice on 'em long 'go.

LUCY BELLE

Gwine ter—right 'way. Ain' gwine ter wait 'noder minute.

POCHER

Turrible! Turrible!

LUCY BELLE

I knows, Mistah Pocher—but—

POCHER

Third time in de las' two days.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*nodding*)

—but, yo' see, wid de chillen an' mah oder
wuk—

POCHER

Kain't he'p dat—!

LUCY BELLE

Kain't allas be stickin' mah haid out dat do'.

POCHER

Nevah seen nuffin' like it.

LUCY BELLE

Yas, yas—! I'se gwine ter sweep it right off.
(*She goes to the closet door, up Left, opens it, takes out a broom, closes the door and goes quickly to the doorway, Back, where she stands sweeping off the doorstep.*)

POCHER

De spell done wuk.

LUCY BELLE (*as she sweeps*)

Yo' reckon so?

POCHER

It wuk ef de salt stay dere two secon's.

LUCY BELLE

'Deed, I'se sorry, Mistah Pocher.

POCHER

Nuffin' kin stop 'em rizin' up now.

LUCY BELLE

Dem boys ain' gwine ter git neah dis do' agin.

POCHER

Dey riz up an' riz up on yo' till de spell done break.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' see, I don' yere 'em ha'f de time—even

GOAT ALLEY

w'en I'se home. Dey slips up on de sly an' draps it on.

POCHER

Yo' wan' ter die?

LUCY BELLE (*pausing in her work and turning*)
No, no—Mistah Pocher.

POCHER

Dem evil sparits git ter wukkin' on yo' in yo' sleep—

LUCY BELLE

I know, I know—

POCHER

Liable ter choke yo' ter deaf.

LUCY BELLE

Sho' don' wan' nuffin' like dat ter happen.

POCHER

Salt on de do'step draw 'em like syrup do flies.

LUCY BELLE

I know, I know—

POCHER (*shuffling over to the door, Right*)
Ain' gwine ter put up wid it no longer!

LUCY BELLE

I'se gwine ter do mah bes' ter stop 'em.

POCHER (*vehemently*)

Ain' gwine ter put up wid it no longer! (*He goes out, Right.*)

LUCY BELLE (*her gaze remaining ruefully fixed on the door, Right*)

Ain' dat de limit? Gawd—!

SLIM

Damn ole fool.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

I sartainly gwine ter make trouble fo' somebody in dis alley.

(She turns to the doorway again and completes the task of sweeping off the steps. This done she closes the door, crosses thoughtfully to closet, places the broom in it, then comes down to Left Center. Slim stands, Right Center, puffing away at his cigarette.)

LUCY BELLE *(abstractedly)*

Dey gittin' wuss lately.

SLIM

Done tol' yo' w'at ter do.

(Lucy Belle gives a little nod and stands lost in thought. Slim regards her with a look of sly, calculating appraisal.)

SLIM *(at length)*

Luce—

LUCY BELLE

Yas—?

SLIM

He'p me out a lil'—?

LUCY BELLE

W'at yo' mean?

SLIM

Lemme eat yere fo' a few days.

LUCY BELLE

Eat yere—!

SLIM

Jes' till I gits on mah feet.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*tartly facetious*)

W'at yo' standin' on—yo' han's?

SLIM

Gwine ter take me a week ter git goin'.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' mean a monf.

SLIM

Lay off me wid dat kin'-a talk.

LUCY BELLE

Nuffin' doin'—!

SLIM

Luce—please—

LUCY BELLE

Yo' yered w'at I say.

SLIM

I'se only jes' out-a de hospital—

LUCY BELLE

Yo' own fault yo' wen' dere.

SLIM

Yo' lie—!

LUCY BELLE

Git in a fight in Messer's stable—an' some-
body bus' yo' ovah de haid wid a stick.

SLIM

Who say I did?

LUCY BELLE

I yered all 'bout it.

SLIM

Nevah raise a han'—.

LUCY BELLE

Dat's wa't yo' say.

SLIM

Gawd's truf! Nevah done a thin'. Dick Simp-

GOAT ALLEY

son an' Mink Hall start ter fight—an' fust
thin' I knows somebody bus' me—

LUCY BELLE

I ain' carin' 'bout w'at happen—all I knows—

SLIM

Luce—

LUCY BELLE

Done feed yo' all I'se gwine ter!

SLIM

Wan' me ter starve?

LUCY BELLE

Git out an' hussle—now. Yo's a lotbettah able
den I is.

SLIM (*harshly reproachful*)

Gittin' hard as hell, ain' yo?

LUCY BELLE

I reckon I'se gittin' wise in mah ole age.

SLIM

Len' me a dollah, den.

LUCY BELLE

Len' yo' nuffin', Slim.

SLIM

Fifty cents—!

LUCY BELLE (*emphatically, as she shakes her head*)

No—!

SLIM

Keep me gwine till termorrer.

LUCY BELLE

Nuffin' doin'.

SLIM (*clenching his fists and coming toward her
menacingly*)

Yo' bettah by a damn sight change yo' min'!

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*Backing away*)

Yo' keep 'way from me, Slim Dorsey!

SLIM (*With a savage shout*)

Gimme a dollah—!

LUCY BELLE (*Stopping abruptly and standing her ground squarely*)

Die fo' I give yo' 'noder cent! (*He leans forward as though to lunge at her. She steps back a pace.*) Don' yo' dare lay a han' on me! Don' yo' dare! I'se gwine ter yell "Po-lice!" an' "Murder!" ef yo' tech me—!

(*Old man Pocher is heard coming heavily down the stairs, Right. Both Slim and Lucy Belle turn and listen.*)

LUCY BELLE

Sen' ole man Pocher out fo' he'p.

(*Slim hesitates for a moment or two, then turns and slinks to the door, Back.*)

SLIM (*turning at the door*)

I git yo' fo' dis!

LUCY BELLE (*defiantly*)

Git me!

(*She turns and stands listening as Pocher descends the stairs. At length the door, Right, opens and the old man enters carrying a very old black leather portmanteau—so old and battered and scarred that it looks as though it were about to fall to pieces. There is fiery resolve in Pocher's eyes. He gives Lucy Belle a sharp glance and makes directly for the door, Back.*)

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*hesitatingly*)

H'yo', Mistah Pocher—!

POCHER (*halting and glaring at her*)

W'at—?

LUCY BELLE

Yo'—yo' gwine 'way?

POCHER

Sho' I'se gwine 'way.

LUCY BELLE

Visit yo' son—?

POCHER (*fiercely*)

I'se gwine ter leave dis place fo' good.

LUCY BELLE

Leave—fo' good—!

POCHER

Tol' yo' I was'n' gwine ter put up wid dat non-sense no longer.

LUCY BELLE

Oh, but, Mistah Pocher—

POCHER

Had er vision dat somebody gwine ter make dem evil sparits riz up on me agin. Pack mah valise dis mawnin' ter be ready.

LUCY BELLE

I ain' gwine ter let it happen agin.

POCHER

Yo' say dat befo'.

LUCY BELLE

Gwine ter de station right dis minute an' put de *po*-lice on 'em.

POCHER

Kin feel dem sparits wukkin' on me now.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Yo' kin break de spell.

POCHER

I'se gwine ter break it by gittin' 'way.

LUCY BELLE

Please, Mistah Pocher—don' go off like dis—

POCHER (*taking a step or two toward the door*)

Kain't stan' it yere no longer.

LUCY BELLE

Gimme anoder chanct.

POCHER (*pausing*)

Warn yo' ha'f er dozen times.

LUCY BELLE

I know—I know—

POCHER (*proceeding toward the door*)

Mus' live in peace—an' de presence ob de sparit
ob de Lawd!

LUCY BELLE

Mistah Pocher—!

POCHER (*turning and speaking in fierce tones as he reaches the door*)

Hush yo' talk! Done made up mah min' ter
leave dis place! Nuffin' gwine ter stop me!

LUCY BELLE (*pulling herself together and speaking in resigned tones*)

Ef—ef yo' feels dat way 'bout it—I reckon dey
ain' no use.

POCHER

I sen' mah nephew—Joe Davis—'roun' fo' mah
organ.

LUCY BELLE

All right.

GOAT ALLEY

POCHER

Reckon he'll come 'roun' termorer wid his wagon.

LUCY BELLE

Gwine ter pay me?

POCHER

Pay yo' fo' w'at?

LUCY BELLE

Yo' been yere free days dis week.

(He glares at her, gives a snort, drops the portmanteau, thrusts a hand down in his pocket and brings out a small, soiled bag, tied at the top with a string. He unties the string, fumbles around in the bag, finally pulls out a dirty, torn one-dollar bill.)

POCHER *(holding it out to her)*

Yere.

LUCY BELLE *(advancing and taking it)*

T-thanks. Might—mighty sorry yo' gwine off
—like dis.

(Pocher gives an impatient grunt and mumbles something to himself. He returns the bag to his pocket, picks up his portmanteau and opens the door.)

LUCY BELLE

Goodbye.

POCHER *(shortly)*

Goodbye. *(He goes out, Back, closing the door after him.)*

(Lucy Belle gives a little despairing sigh, then returns slowly to Center, where she halts and stands

GOAT ALLEY

staring—somewhat abstractedly—down at the bill in her hand. Slim appears at the window, Left Back, and peers in. At length Lucy Belle goes to the cupboard on the Left, opens one of the top doors, removes the lid from a crockery jar, reaches down in it, and takes out her pocket book. She opens the pocket book, extracts three one dollar bills, counts them carefully, places the one she has just received with them and returns them all to the pocket book. Slim's face disappears from the window, Left Back. Lucy Belle comes thoughtfully back to Center with the pocket book still in her hand. At this juncture Israel and Fanny dash in, Back.)

ISRAEL

Mamma! Mamma!

LUCY BELLE

W'at yo' wan' now?

FANNY

Mamma—!

ISRAEL

Mamma, I'se hangry!

LUCY BELLE

Did I call yo'?

FANNY

No, but—

LUCY BELLE

Stay out dere an' play till I calls yo'!

FANNY

I'se hangry!

LUCY BELLE (*displaying the pocket book*)

I'se gwine down ter de mawket in jes a minute.

GOAT ALLEY

FANNY

W'en we gwine ter have dinnah?

LUCY BELLE (*impatiently*)

Jes' as soon as I kin cook it.

ISRAEL

Mamma—!

LUCY BELLE (*angrily*)

Shet up, now—bof-a yo'! Wan' me ter lock yo' up? (*Israel begins to whimper.*) Yo' yere me? Go on out dere an' play! (*The children hesitate.*) Go 'long! Wan' me ter beat yo'? (*They both scamper to the door, Back.*) Min' yo' don' go out-a dis alley!

(*They go out, Back, banging the door shut after them. She drops her pocket book on the table, picks up her coat and puts it on. A light knock sounds on the door, Back. She starts to answer the door, but halts abruptly and a look of suspicion comes over her face. Her eyes light upon the pocket book. She picks it up, goes to the cupboard, Left, drops it in the crockery jar, puts the lid on, closes the cupboard door and hurries to the door, Back. Just as she reaches it, the knock sounds again. She opens it. Chick Avery stands outside.*)

LUCY BELLE

Chick—!

CHICK (*making an obsequious bow*)

Dat's me!

LUCY BELLE

Come in!

(*He enters, carrying a suit case, which he deposits*

GOAT ALLEY

near the door. He looks a little more spruce than in the preceding act and carries himself with a decidedly prosperous air. Lucy Belle closes the door, and they both come down to Center.)

CHICK

De boat jes' git in.

LUCY BELLE

It did—?

CHICK

Mighty good ter see yo' agin.

LUCY BELLE (*with a coy toss of her head*)

Go 'long!

CHICK

On mah way ter de Gran' Imperial.

LUCY BELLE (*trying to place the name*)

Gran' Imperial—!

CHICK

Colored hotel ovah yere on M Street.

LUCY BELLE

Oh—de one Jim Mumblly keep!

CHICK (*nodding*)

Yas.

LUCY BELLE

Uster be de Johnson House.

CHICK (*with a laugh*)

Yas, yas. Change its name ev'y monf.

LUCY BELLE

Is yo' stoppin' dere, now?

CHICK

Jes' now an' den. Git tired gwine 'way out ter mah broder's in G'orgetown ev'y time I'se in

GOAT ALLEY

town. Min' ef I leave dis suit case yere till I see
ef dey got a room at de hotel?

LUCY BELLE

No, indeedy!

CHICK

Ef dey is, I'll sen' a boy ovah fo' it—ef dey
ain', I'll drap back an' git it an' go on out ter
G'orgetown,—'less yo' wan' ter put me up yere.

LUCY BELLE

W'at yo' talkin' 'bout?

CHICK (*sitting on the edge of the table*)

Jes' met ole man Pocher gwine down de line.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' did—!

CHICK

Say he jes' give up his room.

LUCY BELLE (*removing her jacket and throwing it
over the back of a chair*)

I reckon he tol' yo' de truf.

CHICK

W'at's de mattah?

LUCY BELLE

Boys in de alley keep aftah him all de time.
Pesters him ter deaf. Puts salt on de do'step
an' ev'ythin' like dat.

CHICK

Go 'long!

LUCY BELLE

Done ev'ythin' dey could ter git his goat.

CHICK

Hard bunch, ain' dey?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

'Deed dey is—an' I ain' had no time ter lay fo' 'em.

CHICK

Mighty sorry yo' havin' dis trouble. Ef dey's any way I kin he'p yo' clean up fo' 'em, lemme know.

LUCY BELLE

Ain' nuffin' yo' kin do. I oughter put de *po-lice* on 'em—but, yo' knows, dat gwine ter make all kin'-a trouble fo' me. (*He nods.*) Dere people 'ud blackguard me—an' raise hell.

CHICK

Why don' yo' move?

LUCY BELLE (*shaking her head*)

Kain't right now.

CHICK

Gwine ter keep on rentin' it?

LUCY BELLE

W'at—?

CHICK

De room.

LUCY BELLE

Sho'—!

CHICK

Got anabody fo' it?

LUCY BELLE (*irritated by the assumption she should act so quickly*)

W'at yo' spec'? He only jes' give it up.

CHICK

Lemme have it.

LUCY BELLE (*measuring him with a withering glare*)

Fo' Gawd sakes—! Listen ter yo'—!

GOAT ALLEY

CHICK

Go ahaid!

LUCY BELLE

Is yo' crazy—?

CHICK

I only be in it free days a week—an' I'll pay yo'
twict as much as Pocher.

LUCY BELLE

Don' care ef yo' pays me five times as much.

CHICK

W'at's de mattah wid yo'? I ain' got smallpox
or nuffin' like dat—

LUCY BELLE

Yo' knows I ain' gwine ter let yo' have dat room.

CHICK

Don' like mah looks—huh?

LUCY BELLE (*with a laugh*)

Sho'—dat's it. Waitin' fo' a bettah lookin' man
ter come 'long.

CHICK (*with an explosive laugh*)

Nevah did have no luck wid de ladies.

LUCY BELLE (*in the same spirit*)

Ain' gwine ter till yo' git anoder face.

(*Chick nods and chuckles.*)

CHICK (*at length, seriously*)

Luce—listen ter me—

LUCY BELLE

Chick Avery, lay off wid dat nonsense—

CHICK

I gits so lonesome—

LUCY BELLE (*shaking her head and scowling*)

Nuffin' doin'.

GOAT ALLEY

CHICK

Jes' till I fin's a room 'roun' dis neighborhood
dat suit me.

LUCY BELLE (*with mock ferocity*)

Yo' wan' me ter bus' yo' in de eye?

CHICK

Ain' I yo' frien'—?

LUCY BELLE (*nodding*)

Sho' yo' is! An' I wan's yo' ter stay mah frien'.

(*Chick grins and shakes his head, as though he regarded her as an extremely difficult person to understand.*)

CHICK (*breaking into song*)

“Yo' kin break mah bones,
Wid sticks an' stones,
But I'se gwine ter live anahow till I die.”

LUCY BELLE

Yo' oughter be singin' fo' a livin'—'stead-a
barbarin'.

CHICK

Dat's w'at ev'body tell me.

(*They both laugh explosively. Lucy Belle sits down.*)

CHICK (*at length*)

Enjoyed yo'se'f at dat dance at de Mawnin'
Star, did'n' yo'?

LUCY BELLE

Sho' did—!

CHICK

Glad yo' wen', now. ain' yo'?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

I reckon so.

CHICK

Yo' knows so!

LUCY BELLE

Anaway yo' says.

CHICK

Had ter beg yo' long nuff ter git yo' ter go.

LUCY BELLE

I was'n' feelin' so good jes' den.

CHICK

'Noder dance up dere Saturday night.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' don' say—

CHICK

Big or-kestra an' plenty ter drink.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' gwine—?

CHICK

Sho'! Wan' ter go?

LUCY BELLE

Kain't.

CHICK (*impatiently*)

Sho' yo' kin. (*She shakes her head.*) W'at's de mattah wid yo'?

LUCY BELLE

Not dis time.

CHICK

Why not? Is yo' sick?

LUCY BELLE

I ain' feelin' jes' right.

GOAT ALLEY

CHICK

Dat's wa't yo' needs—ter git out an' have a good time.

LUCY BELLE

I know—

CHICK

Yo' wan' ter quit wukkin' so steady.

LUCY BELLE

Tell me somefin' I don' know.

CHICK

Why don' yo'—?

LUCY BELLE

Why don' I quit breafin'?

CHICK

Yo' look ten yeahs younger at dat las' dance.

LUCY BELLE (*with a deprecating laugh*)

Wish I thought so.

CHICK

I'm tellin' yo' so!

LUCY BELLE

Did'n' feel no ten yeahs younger w'en I gits out on dat flo'.

CHICK

'Noder one up dere free weeks from nex' Saturday.

LUCY BELLE

Dat so?

CHICK

Come on an' go ter dat.

LUCY BELLE (*rising*)

Kain't, Chick.

CHICK (*sliding off the table*)

Gwine ter stick home yere—all de time?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Right now, I is.

CHICK

Luce—is yo' sore at me?

LUCY BELLE

No—no, indeedy, Chick.

CHICK

Den w'at's de mattah?

LUCY BELLE

Nuffin'—nuffin' at all. Only I jes' don' wan' ter go nowhars—fo' a while.

CHICK

An' yo' don' wan' me ter show yo' a good time?
(*She shakes her head.*) Or he'p yo' out a lil'—?

LUCY BELLE

Don' wan' nobody ter he'p me out!

(*Chick springs over to her side and takes her forcibly in his arms.*)

LUCY BELLE

Chick! Stop! Oh, mah Gawd—! Yo'—!

CHICK

Yo' mine—mine—!

LUCY BELLE (*struggling frantically to free herself*)

Lemme go, Chick—! Chick! Stop—!

CHICK

Mah lil' budigee—! Yas, yo' is! Ain' yo' mine! Damn yo', say yo's mine!

LUCY BELLE

Lemme go! Yo' wan' me ter yell, "Po-lice!"

CHICK (*savagely*)

Yo' ain' gwine ter yell nuffin'! (His arms

GOAT ALLEY

tighten about her.) Gimme a kiss! Come on!
Yo' yere me?

LUCY BELLE (*turning her head away and protesting between gasps*)
Chick! Yo' killin' me—!

CHICK

Kiss me—lovah! Yo' yere—! Kiss me!

LUCY BELLE

Oh, Gawd—! Chick, don'—!

(He contrives to implant a prolonged kiss on her lips. At length, with a superhuman effort, she wrenches herself free, and retreats to the opposite side of the table. Chick starts to follow her, whereupon she runs around to the back of the table, where she stands, breathing heavily and weak from the struggle. Chick stands facing her—on the opposite side of the table and with back to the audience—his muscles taut, as though ready to lunge after her.)

LUCY BELLE (*stretching out her arms beseechingly*)
Don', Chick—oh, don'—! Don' come at me
like dat!

CHICK

Luce—listen ter me—!

LUCY BELLE

Chick—! Please—! Sam—mah own Sam-boy
—he's mah lovah. He's de onlies' one—now!

CHICK

He ain' nevah comin' back ter yo'!

LUCY BELLE

Yas, he is! De minute he git out! Yo' don'
know Sam like I does. I got ter stick ter him—

GOAT ALLEY

no matter weder he in jail or not. Gimme a chanct, Chick. Please—! Yo' mah bes' frien' —nex' ter Sam. Gimme a chanct ter keep mah promise ter him! Don' do nuffin' dat gwine ter make him come back an' kill yo'! (His muscles relax, as though her appeal had moved him somewhat.) Don'—don' come at me like dat, Chick, ole boy—

(He gives a little, hollow laugh, reaches in his pocket, brings out a package of Sweet Corporals, puts one in his mouth and lights it. Lucy Belle runs a hand over her hair, which is all dishevelled, then glances down at her waist.)

LUCY BELLE

Don' make a wreck ob me.

(She moves hesitatingly to the door, Left, and pauses for a moment when she reaches there. He watches her with a narrow, tense gaze.)

LUCY BELLE

'Scuse me a minute.

(She goes out, Left. Chick leans back against the table and smokes in sullen, contemplative silence. Presently a knock sounds on the door, Back. Chick turns his head and listens. The knock sounds again. He goes nonchalantly to the door and opens it. Aunt Rebecca stands in the doorway.)

AUNT REBECCA (*exclaiming*)

Gawd-a-massy! Chick Avery, how is yo'?

CHICK

Fine and dandy.

GOAT ALLEY

(She steps into the room. Chick closes the door.)

AUNT REBECCA

Still on de Norfolk boat?

CHICK

Yas, indeedy.

AUNT REBECCA

Makin' good money?

CHICK

Would'n' be dere ef I was'n'.

AUNT REBECCA

Whar's Lucy Belle?

CHICK

In dere. (He inclines his head toward the room, off Left.)

AUNT REBECCA

Drap in ter say howdy. (Chick, who has stood with his hand on the knob, opens the door again.)

Yo' ain' gwine—?

CHICK

On mah way. See yo' some mo'.

AUNT REBECCA (shortly)

Goodbye.

(He goes out, closing the door after him.)

AUNT REBECCA (somewhat peeved by the abruptness of his departure)

Humph! No-count, like all de res' dem yellow niggahs (Calling.) Lucy Belle—oh, Lucy Belle!

LUCY BELLE (off stage, Left)

Dat yo', Aun' Becky—?

GOAT ALLEY

AUNT REBECCA

Sho' is, honey!

LUCY BELLE

Come on in yere.

(Aunt Rebecca goes out, *Left*. A moment or two later the door, *Back*, opens a foot or two and Slim sticks his head in and looks about. Seeing no one, he enters stealthily and closes the door slowly and with extreme care. He moves cautiously to the chair, *Left Center*, on which Lucy Belle's coat lies. He picks up the coat—or jacket—and goes rapidly through the pockets in search of her pocket book. Unable to find it in them, he drops the coat and stands in tense thought. His eyes wander over to the cupboard, *Left*. With quick, cat-like movements he goes to it, opens one of the top doors, removes the lid from a crockery jar, peers into it, sees nothing, removes the lid from the next one, peers into it, discovers the pocket book, reaches in and takes it out. He quickly extracts the four one-dollar bills, counts them and stuffs them in his pocket. He then drops the pocket book back in the jar, replaces the lid, and closes the door of the cupboard. He slips quickly across to the door, *Back*, opens it and goes out. In his hurry to get out he gives the door a little bang as he shuts it. A moment later Lucy Belle enters, *Left*, with a startled, inquiring look and glances about.)

AUNT REBECCA (*off stage, Left*)

W'at's de mattah?

LUCY BELLE

Thought I yered somebody come in.

GOAT ALLEY

(*Aunt Rebecca enters, Left.*)

AUNT REBECCA (*glancing about*)

Jes' now?

LUCY BELLE

Yas.

AUNT REBECCA

Go 'long!

LUCY BELLE

Reckon I mus' been dreamin'.

AUNT REBECCA

W'at yo' yere?

LUCY BELLE

Soun' like de do' shettin'.

AUNT REBECCA

Sho' don' see nobody.

LUCY BELLE (*glancing at the clock on the cupboard.*)

The hands point to half-past one)

Um! Got ter hussle.

AUNT REBECCA

Wukkin' dis afternoon?

LUCY BELLE (*nodding*)

Lot-a ironin' ter do. Got ter git some dinnah fust, dough.

AUNT REBECCA (*in surprise*)

Ain' yo' had yo' dinnah?

LUCY BELLE

No.

AUNT REBECCA

Gawd-a-massy!

LUCY BELLE

Waste a lot-a time chewin' de rag wid Chick.

GOAT ALLEY

AUNT REBECCA

Go ahaid! Don' lemme stop yo'.

LUCY BELLE (*with a sigh, as she picks up her jacket*)

Gawd—! (*Draws a hand across her forehead.*)

AUNT REBECCA

Honey, w'at's de mattah—?

LUCY BELLE

Oh—nuffin'—

AUNT REBECCA

Yo' did'n' look right ter me w'en I fus' look at yo'—in dere jes' now.

LUCY BELLE

I'se a lil' tired—dat's all, I reckon.

AUNT REBECCA (*stepping over and observing Lucy Belle closely*)

Why, honey, yo' all nervous an' trembly—!

LUCY BELLE

No, I ain', Aun' Becky—

AUNT REBECCA

Yo' is! Now, listen ter me—don' yo' go ter wuk dis aftahnoon.

LUCY BELLE

Got ter!

AUNT REBECCA

No yo' ain'! W'at yo' talkin' 'bout?

LUCY BELLE

Put Moy in a hole ef I don'.

AUNT REBECCA

Don' make no diff'rence.

LUCY BELLE

'Spouse ter deliver mos'-a dem clothes termorrer.

AUNT REBECCA

Yo' good healf come fust.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Liable ter git sore an' git somebody else ef I
don' show up.

AUNT REBECCA (*with a snort*)

W'at d'yo' care? Let him! Dat ole Chink
ain' got de onlies' job in de worl'.

LUCY BELLE (*shakes her head*)

Ain' got no time ter go 'roun' lookin' fo' some-
fin' else right now.

AUNT REBECCA (*impatiently*)

Yo' nevah take no 'vice.

LUCY BELLE

Yas, I does, Aun' Becky, but—

AUNT REBECCA

Yo' don'—! Yo' be in bed ef yo' ain' careful.

LUCY BELLE (*in conciliatory tones*)

'Deed, I got ter git back dere dis aftahnoon.

AUNT REBECCA (*shuffling grumpily toward door,
Back*)

Go ahaid, den. Git yo'se'f some dinnah fo' yo'
do, dough.

LUCY BELLE

I'se sho' gwine ter! Reckon I feel bettah aftah
I gits a lil' somefin' ter eat. (*Following Aunt
Rebecca to the door.*) Come ovah dis evenin'!

AUNT REBECCA

I don' know—

LUCY BELLE

Oh, please, Aun' Becky.

AUNT REBECCA (*at the door*)

W'at time?

LUCY BELLE

Oh—oh, 'bout eight o'clock.

GOAT ALLEY

AUNT REBECCA (*nodding*)

See yo' some mo'.

LUCY BELLE

See yo' some mo'.

(*Aunt Rebecca goes out, Back. Lucy Belle puts on her jacket. She goes to the cupboard, Left, opens the top door, removes the lid from the crockery jar, reaches in and gets her pocket book. Something about its flatness rouses her curiosity. She casually opens it. A look of tragic dismay comes over her face as she discovers that the money is missing.*)

LUCY BELLE

Oh, Gawd!

(*She fumbles about in the jar again, then searches through her pockets. It suddenly comes over her that she has been robbed. She stands staring dumbly before her with an expression of anguish and despair. Israel and Fanny run in, Back.*)

ISRAEL

Mamma! I'se hangry!

FANNY

W'en we gwine ter have dinnah?

LUCY BELLE (*with a sob*)

Hush up!

FANNY

Yo' said yo'd have it right 'way.

ISRAEL

Mamma—ain' yo' gwine ter hurry?

LUCY BELLE (*in a choking voice*)

Yas, yas—Mamma's gwine right out—

GOAT ALLEY

(She is suddenly seized with a spell of dizziness. She sways unsteadily for a moment or two, finally collapses and sinks heavily down on a chair. The children scream and run to her side. She places one hand against the table, grips the back of the chair with the other and manages to hold herself up.)

LUCY BELLE *(in weak, disjointed tones)*

Israel, son—hush! Yo' yere me—? Mamma's gwine ter be all right. Fanny! Git me glass-a-watah. *(The girl hesitates.)* Go on! Quick!

(Fanny runs off, Left.)

ISRAEL *(crying)*

Mamma! Yo'—yo' gwine ter die?

LUCY BELLE

No, no! Hush up!

(He clings to her sobbingly. Fanny enters, Left, with the glass of water and hurries to her mother's side.)

LUCY BELLE *(to Israel)*

Son! Mamma gwine ter beat yo' ef yo' don' stop!

FANNY

Yere, Mamma!

(The child hands Lucy Belle the glass of water. She drinks it slowly.)

LUCY BELLE *(half to herself)*

Gawd, dat tas' good. *(She gradually revives. At length, as she sets the glass on the table.)* Listen

GOAT ALLEY

ter me, yo' chillen. Wan' yo' bof ter run up ter Moy Wing's. Yo' yere me? (*They nod.*) Run up dere—an' tell him dat Mamma gwine ter be late. Go ahaid, now. Beat it! (*They hang back, still sobbing.*) Go on! (*They run to the door, Back.*) Say dat he—he bettah git somebody ter he'p me out—! Understan'—?

FANNY

Yassum.

LUCY BELLE

Beat it now!

(*They go out, Back, closing the door after them. Lucy Belle, weak and completely unnerved, sits staring tragically before her. At length a knock sounds on the door, Back.*)

LUCY BELLE (*half turning and speaking in still feeble tones*)

Come in!

(*The door opens and Chick Avery enters. Lucy Belle struggles to her feet.*)

CHICK

Back agin—!

LUCY BELLE

Oh—er—! Did'n' take yo' long—.

CHICK

No rooms at de Gran' Imperial. Gwine on out ter mah broder's.

(*He directs a fascinated gaze at her for a brief interval, as though half-tempted to make another ardent and forcible appeal. He thinks better of it, however, and starts to reach for the suit case.*)

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*in tremulous, half-hysterical tones*)
Chick—!

CHICK (*straightening up*)
Yas—?

LUCY BELLE
Reckon yo' kin have dat room.

CHICK (*incredulously*)
W'at—?

LUCY BELLE
I—I'll rent it ter yo'.

CHICK (*as though he could hardly believe his ears*)
Luce—!

(*She half turns away from him and gazes before her with a face full of woe.*)

CURTAIN

ACT III

The same as Act II—a year and a half later.

It is early evening and the lamp on the table is lighted. The chimney is badly smoked and the guttering flames cast eerie shadows about on the walls.

Aunt Rebecca is discovered seated to Right of table. Lucy Belle is seated near her, Right Center, and is noticeably thinner and more wan than in the preceding act. On the floor at her side sits a large basket, full of washing and on a chair nearby lies her coat and hat.

The imposing cupboard which formerly stood against the wall, Left, and the large easy chair are missing.

LUCY BELLE

'Deed, we done miss yo' while yo's sick.

AUNT REBECCA (*shaking her head*)

Don' wan' no mo' spells like dat.

LUCY BELLE

No, indeedy! I reckon not.

AUNT REBECCA

Been six yeahs since rheumetiz took me down like dat.

LUCY BELLE

Git yo' hard w'en it do.

AUNT REBECCA

'Deed it do, 'deed it do!

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Mighty sorry I did'n' git in ter see yo' mo' den
I did.

AUNT REBECCA

Dat's all right. I ain' boderin' 'bout dat *at all*.

LUCY BELLE

Yo'—yo' see, I'se so busy wid mah wuk, an'
lookin' aftah thin's 'roun de house—an'—an'
de baby.

AUNT REBECCA

Yas, yas—honey. I knows how it is.

LUCY BELLE

Yo' 'scuse me a minute, won' yo'?

AUNT REBECCA

Sartainly, sartainly.

LUCY BELLE

Got ter run 'roun' ter Miss Erminie's wid dis
yere washin'.

AUNT REBECCA

Sho'—sho', honey! Yo' go right 'long. Don'
yo' boder 'bout me.

LUCY BELLE

Only jes' 'roun' de corner. Be right back.
(*Rising and moving toward, Left.*) Reckon I
bettah bring dat baby out yere. No tellin'
w'at dem chillen liable ter do ter it while I'se
gone.

(*She goes out, Left, and returns immediately
carrying a very young Negro baby.*)

AUNT REBECCA (*exclaiming*)

Mah soul, dat's a fine baby! Ain' he dough?
Yo' wan' me ter hol' him?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Ef yo' don' min'—till I gits back.

AUNT REBECCA

Sho'! Sho'! (*Lucy Belle places the baby in Aunt Rebecca's arms and the old woman gazes down at him admiringly.*) Gawd-a-massy! Bless yo' heart! Ain' yo' mah lil' honey-boy? Smile at me — dat's it — smile! Ootchum-kootchum! Ootchum—kootchum!

(*Fanny and Israel run in, Left. Both wear nightgowns.*)

FANNY

Mamma! Whar yo' all gwine?

ISRAEL

Mamma! Git me some candy!

LUCY BELLE (*sharply*)

Yo' all hush! Git right back ter bed! Go 'long!

FANNY (*whimpering*)

I'se scar't ob de night doctahs.

LUCY BELLE

Hush, child! Night doctahs ain' gwine ter git yo' in yere. Go 'long! (*Threateningly.*) D'yo' wan' me ter knock yo' hails off?

ISRAEL

Mamma! Git me—!

(*Lucy Belle grabs them roughly and pushes them through the door, Left, and closes it after them. They cry for several moments and then gradually stop.*)

LUCY BELLE (*with a little sigh, as she comes back to Center*)

Reckon I bettah be on mah way. (*Beginning*

GOAT ALLEY

to put on her hat and coat.) I ain' nevah had no luck. Some gals gits by widout no trouble at all. I ain' one-a dem kin'. Nuffin' I evah done come out right—nuffin' at all. Ef I starts anathin' it's boun' ter go wrong. I—I'se conjuhed fo' life.

AUNT REBECCA

Hush, chile! Don' git down in de mouf like dat. Yo' luck liable ter change any minute. Min' did aftah I gits rid-a dem warts.

LUCY BELLE

I ain' got no bus'ness wid all dese chillen. I'se a fool—Gawd knows I is. (*Wistfully.*) Ain' only one niggah evah treated me decent. Gawd knows, he treated me right!

AUNT REBECCA

Yo' means Sam. (*Lucy Belle nods.*) Still in jail, ain' he?

LUCY BELLE (*nodding*)

Down in de penitentiary at Moun'sville. He kain't write, so I don' nevah yere from him.

AUNT REBECCA

Nevah min', he gwine ter come back someday.

LUCY BELLE

Gawd, I hope so!

AUNT REBECCA

W'at come dat yallow—um—lessee—w'at's his name—uster see him 'roun' yere—

LUCY BELLE

Chick Avery.

AUNT REBECCA

Yas—Chick Avery. Dat who I means.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*darkly*)

He git a job barbarin' on de boat dat run from
New York ter Chawlston.

AUNT REBECCA

Go 'long—!

LUCY BELLE (*bitterly*)

Been gone free mon's. I ain' seen nor yere from
him since he lef'. (*She picks up the basket of
clothes and goes to the door, Back.*) Only be a
minute, Aun' Becky.

(*Aunt Rebecca grunts and nods. Lucy Belle
goes out, Back. Aunt Rebecca sits in brooding
thought for a moment or two, then begins to chant
to herself.*)

AUNT REBECCA

Um — a — um — a — um — a — um — a — um
— a — um — a — um — a! Trouble in mah
soul! Um — a — um — a — um — a — um — a
— um — a — um — a! Trouble in mah soul! Um
— a — um — a — um — a — um — a! Trouble
in mah soul! (*High treble.*) Um — a — um — a —
um — a — um — a — um — a — um — a! Trouble in
mah soul! Um — a — um — a — um — a — um — a —
um — a — um — a — um — a!

(*Footsteps and someone whistling are heard off
stage, Back. Aunt Rebecca stops and listens.
The door opens and Slim Dorsey enters, Back.*)

SLIM

'Lo, Aun' Becky. W'at yo' all doin' yere?

AUNT REBECCA

Min'en de baby fo' Lucy Belle.

GOAT ALLEY

SLIM

Whar she?

AUNT REBECCA

Takin' washin' 'roun' ter Miss Erminie's.

(Slim takes a bag of tobacco and a pack of cigarette papers from his pocket and proceeds to roll a cigarette.)

SLIM

Dat gal ain' no good. She make twict as much
ef she was ter wuk out.

AUNT REBECCA *(sharply)*

W'at kin'-a bruder is yo'? Dat ain' no way ter
talk. W'at she do wid de chillen—an'—an' dis
yere baby?

SLIM *(licking the cigarette)*

Make a present ob 'em ter somebody.

AUNT REBECCA

Shame on yo'—shame on yo'—talkin' like dat!
She do de bes' she kin! An' yo' jes' lay 'roun'
an' let her keep yo'.

SLIM

Dat's a lie! I wuks a damn sight harder den she
do.

AUNT REBECCA

Whar yo' wuk?

SLIM

On de wharf—shuckin' oysters.

AUNT REBECCA

Dat steady?

SLIM

Steady in season. I fishes w'en I ain' wukkin'
dere. Dat's why we move ovah yere from

GOAT ALLEY

Carter Street—ter be handy ter de rivah. Don' yo' all go lyin' 'bout me livin' off Lucy Belle,—'less yo' lookin' fo' trouble.

(Aunt Rebecca glowers at him and remains silent for a brief interval. Slim lights his cigarette and sits astride a chair, with the back to the front.)

AUNT REBECCA *(at length)*

She got too many chillen.

SLIM

Ain' nobody knows dat bettah den I do. No niggah an' gwine ter take up wid her now. Mink Hall was crazy fo' ter marry her one time. Huh—he wouldn' look sideways at her now ef he was ter pass her in de street.

(The wind blows and whistles through the cracks. Aunt Rebecca straightens up stiffly and rolls her eyes.)

AUNT REBECCA *(in low, frightened tones)*

Gawd-a-massy! Yo' ain' gwine ter git me—yo' ole hussy!

SLIM

W'at's de mattah?

AUNT REBECCA

Dat's Lil Mundy tryin' ter git back at me.

SLIM *(with a derisive laugh)*

W'at fo'?

AUNT REBECCA

Fo' kickin' dat ole dog ob hers off mah do'step.

(Lucy Belle enters, Back, carrying the empty basket.)

GOAT ALLEY

AUNT REBECCA (*exclaiming*)

Lan' sake, chile! It ain' takin' yo' long.

LUCY BELLE

Don' see me wastin' no time on a night like dis.

(*Giving Slim a stony stare.*) 'Lo, Slim. (She drops the basket near the door, and removes her hat and coat.)

SLIM (*jumping up and going to her quickly*)

Luce—!

LUCY BELLE

W'at—?

SLIM

Sam's yere!

LUCY BELLE (*blankly, as she searches his face*)

W'at d'yo' mean?

SLIM

He's back yere in Wash'nin'.

LUCY BELLE (*with a gasp*)

Oh, Gawd! (*Comes down to Right Center and drops her hat and coat on a chair.*)

SLIM

Mink Hall jes' seen him uptown. He stops in Seventh Street ter buy yo' all somefin'.

LUCY BELLE

Whar did yo' see Mink?

SLIM

On de wharf. Jes' come ovah dere from uptown. Sam tol' him dat he comin' right on out yere.

LUCY BELLE (*with a cry of ecstasy*)

Sam! Mah Sam-boy! (*Then in tones tremulous with emotion.*) How did he git out so soon?

GOAT ALLEY

SLIM

Got his sentence cut short fo' bein good—like I done tol' yo' he might.

LUCY BELLE (*agitatedly*)

W'at—w'at did Mink say ter him—'bout me?

SLIM

Nuffin', I reckon—'Cept dat he ain' seen yo' in a good while—an' dat yo' still livin' yere in Goat Alley.

LUCY BELLE

Yo'—yo' ain' nevah tol' Mink dat I—I got—

SLIM

Yo' mean' 'bout de baby? (*She nods.*) No, no! W'at I tell him dat fo'?

LUCY BELLE (*in earnest entreaty*)

Slim—Slim—! Go down ter end ob de alley—dere by de stable. Sam gwine ter come in dat way sho' as yo' bawn ef he been up on Seventh Street. Ketch him dere—an' take him ovah ter Gerner's. Say dat I gone ovah ter Mag's an' dat I be back late ternight.

SLIM

I ain' boderin' 'bout him.

LUCY BELLE

Slim, please, honey! Won' yo'? Dat ain' gwine ter hurt yo'. (*She pulls up her skirt, reaches down in her stocking and pulls out a dollar bill.*) Yere! (*She hands it to Slim.*) Please—jes' dis onct! Won' yo'? (*He slowly nods, and starts toward the door. She calls after him. He halts and turns.*) Slim, don' tell him whar I is. Jes'—jes' say I'se gone away—an' dat I won' be back

GOAT ALLEY

till in de mawnin'. Yo' yere? Say yo' 'don' know whar I is!

SLIM

All right. (*He goes out, Back.*)

LUCY BELLE (*turning to Aunt Rebecca*)

I—I did'n' have no kin'-a idea Sam 'ud git out so soon. (*Rapturously.*) Sam! Mah, Sam! (*Then fearfully.*) But—but I kain't see him yet —no, no—!

AUNT REBECCA

Now, now—! Don' yo' git yo'se'f in no stew.

LUCY BELLE (*wringing her hands*)

I tol' yo' I ain' nevah had no luck! W'at kin' a po' gal like me do? Yo'—yo' see I got dis yere baby. It—it's free mon's ole, now. Ef—ef he see dat—Oh, Gawd!

AUNT REBECCA

Yo' reckon—!

LUCY BELLE

He'd kill me—sho' as yo' bawn! Yo' see—yo' see, his time was'n' up fo' mos' anoder yeah. Him a' me ain' nevah had no luck an' I did'n't calc'late he'd git out befo'. I—I was gwine ter git ready an' move in 'bout six mon's. Den I was gwine ter writ ter de Warden—or de keeper—or somebody like dat an' git dem ter tell him whar I move ter. (*Moving about agitatedly.*) Ef he only knowed what I been up agin! I—I promised him I would'n' look at anabody else while he was gone. Ef I'd-a had any kin'a-luck nuffin' 'ud make me break it. I loves Sam. I loves him bettah den anathin' in de worl'. He knows I does. (*A moment's pause. Her eyes*

GOAT ALLEY

rove space.) Las' wintah I could'n' git nuffin' much ter do—dat is nuffin' dat pay me much money—an' I had trouble rentin' dat room—. (She pauses for a moment, and drops her eyes, then goes on slowly.) Chick Avery comes 'roun'—yo' know—an' I let's him stay yere—(She pauses again, and then points at the baby.) Dat's his chile.

AUNT REBECCA (*in heartfelt sympathy*)
Yo' po', po' honey!

LUCY BELLE

W'en me an' Sam fust met up he says, "Lucy Belle, I don' care nuffin' at all 'bout w'at yo' done fo' I knowed yo'. Dat's all pas' an' gone an' somefin' we ain' gwine ter boder our haids 'bout." (She stares into space with tragic eyes.) But—but he tol' me onct dat ef I evah had ana-thin' ter do wid anoder niggah he'd kill me.

AUNT REBECCA

He ain' gwine ter do nuffin' like dat! Don' yo' worry!

LUCY BELLE (*with a faint, wistful smile*)

He's de onlies' niggah dat evah done anathin' much fo' me. Mah own Sam-boy, baby buddy! (She stares abstractedly into space for a moment or two.) An'—an' yo' see he's comin' right back ter me—now he's out.

AUNT REBECCA

Yas, indeedy! I reckon he is!

LUCY BELLE (*clenching her hands*)

Oh, Gawd!

GOAT ALLEY

AUNT REBECCA

Nevah yo' min', honey. Yo' ain' got nuffin' ter worry 'bout.

LUCY BELLE

Sam nevah boder his haid 'bout oder gals—not since he know me—'cept ole Lizzie Gibbs fo' a lil' while— (*Fearfully.*) Dat's de onlies' thin' I'se scar't of—is dat niggahs will lie an' black-guard on me!

AUNT REBECCA (*indicating the baby*)

Who all know yo' got dis yere chile?

LUCY BELLE

Only two or free people yere in Goat Alley—an' Slim an' Mag an' yo'. Mag's mah frien' ovah in Anacostia.

AUNT REBECCA

Ef I did'n' have dem gran'chillen I'd keep de baby fo' yo'.

LUCY BELLE

No, no! Would'n' wan' yo' ter do nuffin' like dat.

AUNT REBECCA

W'at yo' calc'late yo' do?

LUCKY BELLE

I don' know, I don' know! I kin take him ovah ter Mag's—but even ef I does—she kain't keep him long—an'— (*Pacing about agitatedly.*) I—I'se got ter do somefin' quick! (*In anguish.*) I ain' done no mo' den oder gals—an'—an'— Sam got ter fo'give me!

(*A knock sounds on the door, Back. Lucy Belle starts.*)

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*in low tones to Aunt Rebecca*)

Take him in dere. (*She points off, Left.*)

(*Aunt Rebecca rises with the baby and goes out hurriedly, Left.*)

LUCY BELLE (*as Aunt Rebecca leaves*)

Come in!

(*The door, Back, opens and Lizzie Gibbs enters. She wears no hat and has a light shawl thrown over her shoulders.*)

LIZZIE (*slouching in*)

'Lo!

LUCY BELLE (*starts back with a look of consternation*)

'Lo—!

LIZZIE

H'yo'—?

LUCY BELLE (*brusquely*)

Fine an' dandy!

LIZZIE

I reckon yo' is! Thought I'd fin' yo' flyin' 'roun' wid yo' eyes poppin' out-a yo' haid.

LUCY BELLE (*with studied complacency*)

I don' know w'at yo' all talkin' 'bout.

LIZZIE (*with a loud, sarcastic laugh*)

Ha! Ha! Ain' got nuffin' on yo' min'—huh?

LUCY BELLE (*defiantly*)

Not a thin'!

LIZZIE

Good frien' ob yo's back in town.

LUCY BELLE

Now yo' said somefin'. Who?

GOAT ALLEY

LIZZIE (*darkly*)

Dat's right—preten' yo' don' know nuffin' 'bout it—yo' damn lil' hussy!

LUCY BELLE (*hotly*)

Don' yo' call me no hussy!

LIZZIE

Don' yo' stan' up dere an' tell me yo' don' know Sam Reed ain' home.

LUCY BELLE (*simulating great surprise*)

Sam! No! Is yo' seen him?

LIZZIE (*mysteriously*)

Ha! Ha! I guess he don' fo'git ole frien's.

LUCY BELLE (*in sharp derision*)

Huh! I bet yo' ain'! I bet yo' all I got yo' ain'!

LIZZIE

Yo' all got de idee yo' got some kin'-a strangle hol' on Sam, ain' yo'?

LUCY BELLE (*hotly*)

I knows damn well he ain' gwine ter fool 'roun' an' ole wench like yo'!

LIZZIE (*menacingly*)

Ef yo' say anathin' like dat agin I bus' yo' in de mouf! (*Lucy Belle gives an explosive, contemptuous laugh.*) Lemme tell yo', gal, I knows a thin' or two 'bout yo'.

LUCY BELLE

Nuffin' but w'at yo' make up out-a yo' own haid.

LIZZIE

Gawd knows, how many times I see yo' on de street las' wintah wid Chick Avery.

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*angrily*)

Yo' nevah! Yo' lie!

LIZZIE (*with a savage laugh*)

Oh, yas, yo' lil' angel face! Yo' nevah done nuffin' wrong in yo' life! (*Darkly.*) Lemme tell yo' one thin'! Keep yo' han's off dat niggah—dis time! Ef I yere yo' been foolin' roun' aftah him I'se gwine ter raise some hell. (*She turns toward the door, Back.*)

LUCY BELLE

Yo' won' do nuffin'!

LIZZIE (*wheeling around*)

Ask anabody dat knows me ef I don' allas make good!

LUCY BELLE

Yo' ain' gwine ter do nuffin'!

LIZZIE (*at the door*)

Ain' I? Yo' wait an' see! I'se gwine ter make dat face-a yo's look like a piece-a sausage. Don' yo' come tryin' ter play any ob dat doll-baby bus'ness wid me! Ha! Ha! Yo' damn lil' hussy, yo'! (*She goes out, Back.*)

(*Lucy Belle stands gazing angrily after her. Aunt Rebecca enters, Left.*)

AUNT REBECCA

Whew-me! Gawd-a-massy! Sweah out a warrant fo' her! Go 'long! Don' yo' let no niggah blackguard yo' like dat.

LUCY BELLE

I'll git her mahse'f—an' ef I don', Sam will. (*Fiercely.*) Some night I ketch her alone an'

GOAT ALLEY

knock her haid off! 'Deed, I'se gwine ter clean up fo' her right!

AUNT REBECCA

Low down yallow wench!

LUCY BELLE (*with a little wail of despair*)

Now, right 'way, she got ter come mixin' in agin. (*Fiercely.*) I done took all I'se gwine ter off her! (*Moving about agitatedly.*) 'Deed, I is! W'at she anaway? Stuck up kase she got straight hair. Nevah done a lick-a wuk in her life.

AUNT REBECCA

Hush, honey! Ain' no use ter git all wukked up!

LUCY BELLE (*with an hysterical laugh*)

Ha! Ha! She think she kin keep Sam 'way from me! I like ter see her! I like ter see her!

AUNT REBECCA

Nevah yo' min'! Nevah yo' min'!

(*A knock on the door, Back. Lucy Belle and Aunt Rebecca start.*)

LUCY BELLE (*calling out in tremulous tones*)

Who dat?

SAM (*off, Back*)

Me—!

LUCY BELLE (*with a gasp*)

It Sam—!

(*She motions to Aunt Rebecca to leave the room. The old woman goes off hurriedly, Left. Lucy Belle stands hesitant. A look of dire fear comes over her face, and she appears to be on the verge of collapse. However, with an effort she controls*

GOAT ALLEY

herself and goes uncertainly to the door, Back, and opens it. Sam steps in. He looks older and thinner than in Act I and his hair is streaked with gray, and his shoulders are a trifle more stooped than before. He wears a dark suit of clothes—the sort furnished to prisoners on the occasion of their release—a collar, but no tie, and he carries a small bundle under one arm. In one hand he carries his hat.)

SAM (*springing forward with a cry of joy*)

Gal—!

LUCY BELLE (*rushing to him*)

Sam!

(*He tosses his hat and the bundle on the table, takes her in his arms and smothers her with kisses.*)

SAM

Honey-baby! Honey-baby!

LUCY BELLE (*murmuring softly*)

Baby! Baby!

SAM

Yo' ain' fo'got yo' ole Sam, is yo'?

LUCY BELLE

No, no! Oh, Sam, Sam! Mah ole Sam-boy!

(*Clinging tightly to him.*) Oh, I'se so glad ter see yo'! Gawd bless yo'!

SAM

Honey-baby! Honey-baby!

LUCY BELLE

Ole Sam-boy! Mah honey-baby buddy-boy!

I'se so glad ter see yo'!

SAM

Yo' all did'n' 'spec' me, did yo'?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

No, no! Did'n' have no idea in de worl' I'se gwine ter see yo' so soon. Not till jes' a minute ago. Slim come an' tol' me. He say Mink Hall tol' him.

SAM (*nodding*)

Yas—I seen Mink uptown.

LUCY BELLE

Ah, Sam-boy! Mah budigee lovah! Yo' ain' nevah gwine ter leave me agin, is yo'?

SAM

Nevah, honey! No, indeedy! Not 'less dey takes me 'way in a box.

LUCY BELLE

Yo's de bes' ole buddy in de worl'!

SAM

Seem ter me like I only had ter shet mah eyes—night or day—an' see yo' face. Only thinkin' 'bout yo' kep' me from killin' ev'body in sight w'en I'se breakin' mah back on dem rock piles. Yo' don' know w'at kin'-a hell I been th'u', gal. Kin'-a hell dat sets a man crazy—'less he's careful.

LUCY BELLE

I knows, I knows. Mus'a been turrible! Turrible! Oh, Gawd!

SAM

Yo' all stay right on yere—all de time?

LUCY BELLE

Yas, yas. Calc'lated ter move two or free times but could'n' fin' nuffin' ter suit me.

SAM (*glancing about the room and noting that the cupboard and large easy chair are missing*)

GOAT ALLEY

Whar's de cupboard—an'—an' dat ole easy
chaiah?

LUCY BELLE

I—I sol' 'em.

SAM

Sol' 'em—!

LUCY (*with a catch in her voice*)

I—I was broke dere fo' a while—an' I had ter.

SAM (*in tones of heartfelt sympathy*)

Yo' po' kid! (*Stroking her hair.*) Dat's all right.
We ain' gwine ter boder nuffin' 'bout dat.
(*Studying her face intently.*) Yo' lookin' mighty
thin.

LUCY BELLE

I'se been wukkin' hard, Sam. 'Tain't so easy
fo' a gal alone—an'—an'—wid two chillen.

SAM

I know it ain', honey-baby. Nevah min'—yo'
ain' gwine ter wuk hard no mo'.

LUCY BELLE (*eagerly*)

Sam—Sam-boy—le's me an' yo' git 'way from
yere—!

SAM

W'at yo' mean—from Wash'nin'—?

LUCY BELLE

Yas, yas. From dis ole hard-luck town!

SAM (*nodding*)

We study 'bout dat d'rectly.

LUCY BELLE

Le's go ter Baltimo'. Dey was mo' wuk w'en
yo' was ovah dere befo'—an' dey paid bettah
wages.

GOAT ALLEY

SAM

Don' know how it is now.

LUCY BELLE

Jes' de same—ev'ybody tell me. An'—an' ef we stay yere, honey—de *po*-lice be aftah yo' all de time.

SAM

No dey won'.

LUCY BELLE

Dey will—yo' knows dey will. Ev'y time dey's a lil' trouble dey gwine ter pick yo' up. An'—an' me an' yo' ain' nevah had no luck in dis town. Befo' we was gwine ter Baltimo' jes' as soon as yo' got a steady job—an' den—at las' we was gwine anaway. Ef—ef we'd picked right up an' wen' at fust ole Jeff Bisbee 'ud nevah come foolin' 'roun'—an' yo'd nevah wen' ter jail—would yo'?

SAM

I reckon not.

LUCY BELLE

I knows yo' would'n'. Aftah all de trouble we had yere—I hates dis place—! I gotta feelin' dat nuffin' ain' gwine ter come right long as we stay yere. I wan's ter git 'way! Le's don' wait dis time. Le's git 'way fo' any ob dat ole hard luck begin!

SAM

Lemme git rested up a lil'—an' den—

LUCY BELLE

Baby, le's git out right away—jes' as quick as we kin. Mah monf yere ain' up till nex' week but I don' care. Le's pack up an' beat it—an'

GOAT ALLEY

git 'way from all dat hard luck—an' *po-lice* an' lyin' an' blackguardin' niggahs. Won' yo', honey-baby? Termorrer or nex' day — de quicker de bettah.

SAM (*nodding*)

All right, lil' gal. Ef dat's w'at yo' wan's, I reckon we'll do it.

LUCY BELLE (*throwing her arms about him*)

Baby, baby! Gawd bless yo'! Mah Sam-boy! Mah Sam-boy!

(*Aunt Rebecca enters, Left.*)

LUCY BELLE (*breaking away from Sam*)

Oh, Aun' Becky! Glad ter see yo'!

AUNT REBECCA

Sam! Gawd bless yo'!

SAM

H'yo' all been?

AUNT REBECCA

'Tolable! 'Tolable! Down wid rheumatiz fo' a while—but I'se all right now. Mighty glad yo's out.

SAM

I'se mighty glad ter be out.

AUNT REBECCA

Mus' 'scuse me. I got ter git home an' cook some suppah fo' mah ole man.

LUCY BELLE

Don' run 'way, Aun' Becky.

AUNT REBECCA

Mus', mah chile! See yo' some mo!

SAM

Goodbye.

GOAT ALLEY

(*Aunt Rebecca goes out, Back.*)

LUCY BELLE (*moving toward the Left*)

Honey-baby, 'scuse me a minute.

SAM

Whar yo' gwine?

LUCY BELLE (*nodding toward Left*)

In yere. Be right back.

(*Sam nods. She goes out, Left. Sam moves slowly and thoughtfully about the room. Presently a loud knock sounds on the door, Back. As he nears it, it opens and Lizzie Gibbs rushes in.*)

LIZZIE (*halting abruptly*)

Sam!

SAM

W'at in hell is yo' doin' yere?

LIZZIE

Well—Sam! So—so yo's out again! Mah soul, but I'se damn glad ter see yo!

SAM

W'at d'yo' wan'? D'yo' yere me?

LIZZIE (*ingratiatingly*)

Sam, kid—come on wid me—fo' a good time! Le's cel'brate!

SAM

Ef yo' keep foolin' 'roun' me, yo's gwine ter git hurt.

LIZZIE

Sam—Sam, ole boy—now hones', w'at is I evah done ter make yo' treat me like yo' has?

SAM

Go 'long! Git out-a yere!

GOAT ALLEY

LIZZIE (*with a show of anger*)

Yo's a damn fool fo' stickin' ter dis gal. She don' mean yo' no good.

SAM (*menacingly*)

Shet up!

LIZZIE

She don' care nuffin' 'bout yo'!

SAM (*stepping toward her*)

Wan' me ter bus' yo' in de mouf?

LIZZIE (*ingratiatingly again*)

Sam—I'se gwine ter git a good job uptown—Monday. I'll keep yo' dis wintah, ole kiddo. Yo' won' haf ter do no wuk. Should think yo' wan' ter take it easy—fo' a while—now yo' out-a jail. Don' yo'? I'll show yo' a good time, son. Yo' kin lay 'roun' an' take it easy—an' git drunk w'en yo'-a min' ter—

SAM

Git out-a yere!

LIZZIE

Sam, I don' wan' ter see nobody like yo' git tied up agin wid a wench like her. Onct was 'nuff—but—

SAM

Git out-a yere—d'yo' yere me? Beat it!

LIZZIE (*angrily*)

Yo's a great big stiff ter let a gal like her take yo' in.

(*The door, Left, opens slightly and Lucy Belle can be seen listening.*)

SAM (*savagely*)

Shet up!

GOAT ALLEY

LIZZIE

Why, she been runnin' 'roun' wid Chick Avery
—evah since yo' lef'. Ha! Ha!

SAM

Dat's a lie!

LIZZIE

So he'p me Gawd, dat's de truf—an' I kin prove
it!

SAM (*menacingly*)

It's a lie!

LIZZIE

She bleed yo' ter deaf an' den tuhn yo' loose.
I'se tellin' yo'!

SAM (*hitting her on the jaw*)

Shet up! Yo' blackguardin' hussy!

LIZZIE (*shrieking*)

Murder! Murder! Po-lice! Po-lice! Murder!

(*Sam darts out the door, Back. Lucy Belle closes the door, Left. Hurried footsteps are heard off stage, Back. Lizzie glances out of the window, Left Back, gives a little gasp, looks wildly about for a place to hide, runs to the closet door, opens it, darts in and pulls it shut after her. A policeman enters, Back.*)

POLICEMAN (*calling out*)

What's the trouble here?

(*He stands looking about the room for a moment or two, then advances toward the door, Left. It suddenly opens and Lucy Belle enters.*)

POLICEMAN (*gruffly*)

What's the matter?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE

Nuffin'—nuffin' at all, sir.

POLICEMAN

There was so! (*Striding over to her.*) Who was that yellin'?

LUCY BELLE

I—I don' know, sir. It was'n' yere.

POLICEMAN

Stop your lyin'. I know better!

LUCY BELLE

No, no! Hones' ter Gawd!

POLICEMAN

Say—where d'yuh get that stuff? Don't yuh think I got ears? (*Goes to the door, Left.*) Who's in here?

LUCY BELLE

Jes' mah chillen.

(*He goes out, Left. She stands watching him. In a moment he re-enters.*)

POLICEMAN (*studying her with an ugly, menacing look*)

I've a good mind to lock you up anyway.

LUCY BELLE (*with a beseeching wail*)

Oh—, oh, please sir,—I ain' done nuffin'!

POLICEMAN (*as he moves toward the door, Back*)

Yuh better watch your step. I ain't goin' to stand for no skylarkin' around this neighborhood.

(*He goes out, Back, and closes the door after him. Lucy Belle turns and goes off hurriedly, Left. She re-enters immediately carrying the baby in her*

GOAT ALLEY

arms and starts toward the door, Back. A second later Fanny—in her nightgown—runs in, Left.)

FANNY

Mamma!

LUCY BELLE

Hush, chile!

FANNY

Whar yo' gwine?

LUCY BELLE

Gwine ter take de baby ovah ter yo' Aun'
Becky's. Git right back ter bed. Go 'long!

*(Fanny goes out, Left, closing the door after her.
Lucy Belle starts again toward the door, Back.
Lizzie steps abruptly out from the closet.)*

LIZZIE *(with a sardonic leer)*

So dat's yo' baby, is it?

LUCY BELLE *(halting with a startled cry)*

Oh! Oh, mah Gawd!

LIZZIE

I knowed I'd git yo'! Pretendin' ter be such a
lil' angel! Ha! Ha! Been up ter all kin'-a
tricks, ain' yo'?

LUCY BELLE

Git out-a yere!

LIZZIE *(slouching slowly toward the door, Back)*

I got yo' numbah, now—yo' lil' rat! Ha! Ha!

LUCY BELLE

W'at in hell d'yo' mean? It ain' mah chile!

LIZZIE

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ain' yo' chile! Ain' yo' chile!
Yo's a good lil' liyah, ain' yo'?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*passionately defiant*)

No—it ain'—yo' blackguardin' hussy!

LIZZIE

Ha! Ha! It sartainly do look like Chick—jes' 'zactly. Wait till I tells Sam. He one-a dem kin' dat ain' so partic'lar. He don' min' accidents now an' den. Ha! Ha! (*She goes out, Back.*)

(*Lucy Belle stands staring tragically to the front. Suddenly a look of desperation comes into her face and she dashes out, Back. Presently Aunt Rebecca enters, Back, and looks inquiringly about.*)

AUNT REBECCA (*calling*)

Lucy Belle! Oh, Lucy Belle!

(*Fanny runs in, Left.*)

FANNY

Mamma gwine ovah ter yo' house wid de baby.

AUNT REBECCA (*nonplussed*)

Mah house!

FANNY

Dat w'at she say.

AUNT REBECCA

'Deed, chile, yo' all mus' been dreamin'.

FANNY (*with a whimper*)

Den—den I don' know whar she is.

AUNT REBECCA

Yo' been dreamin'. Go 'long back ter bed.

(*Fanny reluctantly leaves, Left. Aunt Rebecca sits down in a chair and chants to herself.*)

GOAT ALLEY

AUNT REBECCA

Devil gwine ter git yo'! Um—a—um—a—um
—a—um—a—um—a—um—a! Devil gwine ter
git yo'! Um—a—um—a—um—a—um—a—
um—a! Devil gwine ter git yo'!

*(Suddenly Slim rushes in, Back, breathing
heavily and wild-eyed.)*

SLIM

A-aun' Becky!

AUNT REBECCA

Yas! Yas!

SLIM

Lucy Belle drown de baby!

AUNT REBECCA *(jumping up with a shriek)*

Oh! Oh, mah Gawd! Oh, oh!

SLIM *(jerkily)*

Me an' Mink Hall—an' some oder niggahs—in a game ovah by dem coal chutes. She sneak 'long by Graley's ice house—den run out on de wharf an' th'u it in. Me an' Mink seen ef we would save it—but it was'n' no use. It—it was too da'k. Soon as 'Luce seen me she run' as fas' as she coul'. I believe she gone plum crazy.

AUNT REBECCA

Gawd-a-massy! Gawd-a-massy! Dat po' chile!
I knowed somefin' turrible gwine ter happen.

SLIM

Yo'—yo' ain' seen her, is yo'?

AUNT REBECCA

Gawd-a-massy, no!

SLIM

Come on! Le's see ef we kin fin' her.

GOAT ALLEY

(Aunt Rebecca and Slim go out, Back. In the course of a brief interval Lucy Belle enters stealthily, Back,—dishevelled and terrified. She moves agitatedly about the room, twining and intertwining her fingers. Presently Sam enters, Back.)

SAM

Lucy Belle!

LUCY BELLE (in tremulous tones—as she pulls herself together with a mighty effort)
Sam-boy!

SAM

Was'n' gwine ter take no chances.

LUCY BELLE (avoiding his direct gaze)
No, no! Honey-baby! Mah ole budgee honey-baby! I'se so scar't I did'n' know w'at ter do.

SAM (sharply)

Yo' yere w'at she was tellin' me?

LUCY BELLE (lying)

I yere jes' a lil'.

SAM (fiercely)

She say yo' all been foolin' 'roun' wid Chick Avery.

LUCY BELLE

It's a lie! Ain' a wud ob truf in it!

SAM (grabbing her and searching her face with a gaze of tense scrutiny)
Have yo'?

LUCY BELLE

No, no! Sam! Fo' Gawd's sake! Yo' don' believe a devil like her, d'yo'?

GOAT ALLEY

SAM

Ef I ketches yo' runnin' wid anobody else I'se
gwine ter kill yo'!

LUCY BELLE (*passionately*)

Sam-boy! Hones' ter Gawd—I ain' had nuffin'
ter do wid nobody since yo' been gone! Nuffin'
at all! Yo' believe yo' lil' budigee, don' yo'?
Don' yo', honey-baby?

(*Lizzie enters, Back.*)

LIZZIE (*with a cry of triumph*)

I knowed I'd git yo' numbah!

SAM

Git out-a yere! D'yo' wan' me ter kill yo'?

LIZZIE

Sam—Sam—she got-a baby! It Chick Avery's.
It's yere! Dat's de way she treat yo' all! Ha!
Ha! Makin' a damn fool ob yo'! I allas
knowed yo's an easy mark!

LUCY BELLE (*screaming*)

It's a lie! It's a lie! Don' yo' believe her, Sam!

(*Sam starts for Lizzie. She backs out of the door, Back.*)

LIZZIE (*just outside of the doorway—at the top of her voice*)

I tol' yo' I'd git yo'! I tol' yo' I'd git yo'!
Ha! Ha!

(*Sam starts to rush out after her. He hesitates,
however, and finally bangs the door shut and turns
to Lucy Belle.*)

SAM (*fiercely*)

Yo' yere w'at she say?

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*palsied with fear*)

It ain' so! It's a lie! Yo' knows she could'n' tell de truf! She nuffin' but a dirty, lyin' hussy—! Yo' don' believe her, do yo'?

SAM (*harshly*)

Lemme look 'roun' yere!

LUCY BELLE

Ain' no use, honey. Yo' ain' gwine ter see nuffin'.

SAM (*shoving her aside roughly*)

Lemme look! (*He starts toward Left.*)

LUCY BELLE

Ain' nobody but Fanny an' Israel in dere!

SAM (*loudly*)

Ef yo' try any funny bus'ness wid me I'll kill yo'! Damn yo' heart ter hell!

(*He goes out, Left, closely followed by Lucy Belle. The door stands open and their voices can be heard.*)

LUCY BELLE (*off stage, Left*)

See, Sam—ain' nobody but Fanny an' Israel. Don' wake 'em up! Jes' mah clothes, Sam-boy! Aw, yo' believes me—don' yo'? Yo' don' believe an' ole wench like her!

SAM (*savagely*)

Chick Avery been hangin' 'roun' yere?

LUCY BELLE

No, no! He ain' even in town no mo'. It's all a dirty lie! Lizzie allas blackguardin' me—don' yo' know she is—evah since yo' an' me met up! She say anathin'—anathin' at all ter git back at me.

GOAT ALLEY

(They re-enter, Left.)

SAM (grabbing her by the shoulder and swinging her around full-face to him)

Yo' is seen Chick Avery!

LUCY BELLE

No—no—I ain'—sweah ter Gawd I ain'! Aw, Sam, yo' believes yo' honey-baby, don' yo'?

(A tense pause. He stares down at her as though trying to read the truth in her eyes.)

SAM (at length)

Ef she keep on blackguardin' yo', I'se gwine ter kill her!

LUCY BELLE

Yo' ain' gwine ter boder 'bout her—or nobody, Sam-boy! We gwine ter git 'way from all dem ole niggahs like her—quick as we kin! Ain' we, honey-baby? (Fondly.) Bes' ole buddy in de worl'! I wan's yo', Sam—jes' yo'—nuffin' else.

SAM (muttering)

I'll clean up fo' dat gal!

LUCY BELLE

Yo' loves me, don' yo'?

SAM (impulsively taking her in his arms and clasping her tightly to him)

Yo's all I got in de worl'! Ef yo' fools me, I'll tuhn bad fo' life.

LUCY BELLE

Sam, mah budigee baby, mah ole Sam-boy baby! Ain' nuffin' on Gawd's earf I would'n' do fo' yo'! (Earnestly, as she stares up into his face.) Yo' an' me's gwine ter Baltimo' right 'way quick —ain' we?

GOAT ALLEY

(*Sam nods.*)

SAM (*fondly*)

Honey-baby! Honey-baby!

(*Aunt Rebecca rushes in excitedly, Back.*)

AUNT REBECCA

Lucy Belle! Mah Gawd! Lucy Belle! Is yo' crazy? Dey fish him out—de baby! Oh, mah Gawd!

(*Lucy Belle gives a stifled cry and breaks away from Sam.*)

SAM

Baby! W'at d'yo' mean?

(*A tense silence of several seconds. At length Sam divines her meaning. Aunt Rebecca staggers back—under the stress of the sudden realization of what the consequences of her revelation are likely to be. Lucy Belle stands at one side, moaning softly. Sam rushes at Aunt Rebecca, hits her and knocks her out through the door, Back. She screams. He rushes over, closes the door and locks it.*)

SAM (*rushing at Lucy Belle*)

Damn yo' black heart ter hell! (*She gives an unearthly shriek.*) Yo' will double-cross me! Dis is de way yo' pays me fo' all I done fo' yo'!

LUCY BELLE (*dropping to her knees*)

Sam—Sam-boy—listen! Lemme tell yo'! Oh, Gawd! It ain'—

SAM (*grabbing her*)

I'll show yo' how ter play dat kin'-a game!

GOAT ALLEY

LUCY BELLE (*frantically*)

Sam! Sam!

SAM

I'll fix yo'!

(He takes her by the throat and slowly chokes her to death. She struggles desperately to free herself. At length she grows quiet and her body limp. He throws her on the floor, stands gazing at her for a moment or two, grabs up his hat, slinks to the door, Back, unlocks it, opens it cautiously and goes out, closing it after him.)

CURTAIN





